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THE VINE HUNT

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RECOLLECTIONS OF THE EARLY DAYS

OF THE

VINE HUNT

AND OF ITS FOUNDER

WILLIAM JOHN CHUTE, ESQ., M.P.

OF THE VINE

TOGETHER WITH BRIEF NOTICES OF THE ADJOINING HUNTS

BY

A SEXAGENARIAN

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P R E F A C E.



SINCE these Letters were prepared for the press, the writer has seen the far fuller and more useful work entitled ‘Sporting Reminiscences of Hampshire, by Æsop.’ It may be well to state that the nearly simultaneous appearance of these two books is entirely accidental. The writers have had no communication, and are not personally known to each other. Whenever, therefore, they both state the same fact, or concur in the same opinion, they must claim to be considered as perfectly independent authorities. If there should be any points on which they may be found to differ, the reader must judge for himself, which of the two writers probably possessed the best means of ascertaining the truth on that particular point.





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RECOLLECTIONS
OF
THE VINE HUNT.

LETTER I.

NOTICES OF HUNTING IN THE LAST CENTURY.

June 1864.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—When you met me lately at Hampton Court, and asked me to supply any recollections that I might retain about the early days of the Vine Hunt, and of its popular founder, Mr. Chute, my first impression was that I could produce little or nothing to the purpose. But on further consideration I am inclined to believe that, *if such particulars are worth recording at all*, there is no one now living better qualified for the task than myself: for I was intimate with Mr. Chute from my childhood to the time of his death; I conversed much with sportsmen whose recollections went back a generation before my birth; and I lived in familiar intercourse with many masters of hounds. I dare say I am acquainted with some facts, the memory

of which is fast fading away, and can tell some curious stories that are known only to myself. I will therefore attempt the work that you have been pleased to impose upon me, and will so far enlarge it as to include some brief notices of what I saw in countries adjoining to the Vine. You must expect a little egotism when you call on a sexagenarian to recount his own recollections; but I will try to say as much of other people and as little of myself as I can.

But before I enter on the proposed subject, I must try to give some idea of the different styles of hunting which prevailed in the last century and in the present.

I believe that, a hundred years ago, though there was abundance of hunting, yet it was not conducted so systematically, nor generally on so grand a scale, as it is now. The sport was diffused amongst many smaller establishments, instead of being concentrated into a few large ones. This was especially the case with harriers, of which most country squires, and some tenant farmers, kept each his own cry of hounds, more or less numerous according to his means; and came near to a realisation of that ideal old English gentleman in the song,

Who never hawked nor hunted but on his own ground.

For instance: late in the last century, two neighbouring squires, Terry of Dummer and Harwood of Dean, kept each a regular pack of harriers, scarcely five miles apart; yet the Digweed family, who then, as now, rented nearly the whole parish of Steventon, had a few couples of beagles, with which they hunted over the ground that they occupied midway between the two.

But, besides the numerous packs of harriers belonging to individual proprietors, there was a peculiar

kind, called a town-pack, or a town-cry, not quite extinct now, but then kept in many country towns and villages. These hounds had no kennel, but were billeted, as it were, amongst the tradesmen and other principal inhabitants of the place, and were often to be seen lying about before their owners' doors. On hunting days, they were collected together by a horn blown in the street. A friend of mine recollects seeing this operation performed in the town of Crawley, in Sussex. He says: 'A man on foot, with hobnailed boots, went blowing a horn through the town and hamlet to the place of meeting, and collecting the drowsy blue-mottled southern harriers.' These hounds were followed by men on foot, carrying long poles to help them over the great banks and ditches, the country being then considered impracticable for horses. Crawley, however, is now the centre of a well-appointed pack of foxhounds.

Nor was it at all unusual, in those days, to hunt both hare and fox with the same hounds. Mr. Chute and Mr. St. John had both done this, before they kept regular packs of foxhounds and laid the foundations of two permanent foxhunting countries. Mr. Villebois, also, before he was master of the H. H., kept harriers in the Candover country, which certainly were not altogether guiltless of vulpine blood; for I remember, in his dining-room at Harmsworth, a painting representing a few couples of these hounds running into a fox, nearly as big as themselves, on an open down, and Mr. Villebois himself in the act of springing from his horse.

Less than fifty years ago, there lived near Hailsham, in Sussex, Mr. King Sampson. This gentleman was

an excellent sportsman and exceedingly popular, and is indeed still looked back to with respect, as the father of foxhunting in that country ; but his mode of fox-hunting was peculiar. He kept a pack of powerful harriers with a cross of the foxhound ; and with these he hunted hare habitually, and fox occasionally ; that is to say, whenever he thought he could find one. On these occasions he met very early in the morning, keeping the body of his pack in couples, and trusting to two or three steady old foxhounds for finding. With these he would go quietly round the gorse covers on the Southdown Hills ; and if there was no drag, nor any symptom of a fox having gone into the cover, he did not waste time in drawing it, but went on to another. As soon as a fox was found, the rest of the hounds were uncoupled, and, when once put on the scent of the fox, were sufficiently steady to it through the day. In this way Mr. King Sampson is said to have shown excellent sport ; and I have no doubt that he killed many a fox which a modern pack of hounds, with a modern Brighton field of some hundreds of men, women, and children in the midst of them, must needs have lost. I need scarcely add that this same country has long been hunted by an excellent pack of regular foxhounds.

Late in the last century, some friends of my father attempted to hunt fox with a pack of harriers on the Nettlebed Hills in Oxfordshire. At the beginning of the season they succeeded well enough ; but after Christmas, when foxes had become stronger and more dispersed, these hounds proved unequal to the great distances and long draws required of them, and were generally half tired before the fox was found.

But besides these irregular and desultory modes of foxhunting, of which I have given so many instances, I believe that even regular packs of foxhounds were more frequently kept on a small scale, and differed more from each other, according to the means and sportsmanship of the owner, than is usual in these days, when everybody has the advantage of knowing how other hunts are conducted, and everyone at least aims at one common standard of perfection. In those days a pack of foxhounds was considered to be private property, which the owner was as free to manage according to his own will and pleasure as he was to settle the arrangements of his own shooting or fishing. Hounds were not then advertised in the newspapers. Railroads did not bring men and horses from places twenty or thirty miles distant to the meet. Bad roads and imperfect means of communication confined each hunt within narrow limits. The field usually consisted of a few near neighbours of different ranks, to whom the master might, or might not, send notice, according to his convenience. Mr. Chute, in his earlier days, seems to have had no scruple in taking out his hounds without notice to anyone. A gentleman now living informs me that, when he was a young lad, he had gone to the Vine, believing that the hounds were to hunt that day; but either he had mistaken, or Mr. Chute had changed the day—the one was as likely as the other. At any rate, the hounds were not to go out. On his appearance, however, Mr. Chute, finding that they had not been fed, good-naturedly took them out and found a fox for him. There are also letters from Mr. Chute, written about 1795 from the House of Commons, when he found

that he could get away the next day, desiring that the hounds might meet him in the afternoon with a bag fox, in order to get a gallop on his way home. Beckford, who wrote soon after the middle of the last century, must certainly have considered masters of foxhounds at liberty to act in this independent manner; for he recommends that the place of meeting should not be fixed till the probable state of the weather could be known; and that, when any day proved a very bad scenting one, the master should take his hounds home at once, and go out the next day instead.

The consequence of this independence was a great development of individual character, so that many hunting establishments reflected strongly the peculiar humours and oddities of their owner. Take, for example, the celebrated miser, Mr. Elwes, whose biographer records that his whole foxhunting establishment never cost him so much as 300*l.* a year; who obliged his tenants to maintain his hounds for him during the summer at their several farms; whose one man-servant, old Thomas, for four pounds a year, milked the cows, groomed the horses, looked after and hunted the hounds, and attended at his master's meals, yet could not escape frequent reproaches from his master as 'an idle dog, who wanted to be paid for doing nothing.' *

This was an extreme case; but the establishment of Mr. Poyntz, whom I shall have to mention afterwards, though maintained, I believe, on a scale sufficiently liberal, was yet imbued with much of the

* See the 'Life of John Elwes, Esq.,' by Edward Topham, Esq.

eccentricity of the master—whose pleasure it was to do nothing as other people did—and was conducted in a manner with which, in these days, no subscriber would put up for a single season, and for which indeed few owners of property would now preserve foxes, even if the master kept them, as Mr. Poyntz did, at his own cost.

The boundaries of each hunt, also, were more vague and fluctuating, and more dependent on the personal influence of the master. In some places different packs almost jostled each other, whilst in some parts large districts remained unoccupied, or only occasionally visited: so that there are many instances on record of foxhounds being taken for a time into distant places quite unconnected with their home country. In these days almost all the huntable portion of England is parcelled out into different hunts, with definite boundaries; and, moreover, most countries are now supposed to belong not so much to the master of the pack as to the general body of gentlemen of whose landed property it consists. Consequently these boundaries are not only more accurately defined, but are also held by a more permanent tenure, and with a firmer grasp; a larger number of persons are interested in preserving them; any intrusion would be an offence not only against a single brother sportsman, but against a whole neighbourhood; while the unwritten law of foxhunting has taken such strong possession of the public mind, that such an intrusion would be considered to be as ungentlemanlike as if a man had killed partridges on his neighbour's home farm. But in those days people took their hounds without scruple wherever there seemed to be an opening for them; and a popular country gentleman, with

some landed property of his own, could usually obtain the command of sufficient country for his purpose.

When I was a boy, there was a very old sporting farmer who still came out occasionally to see a fox found. I have heard him declare that, when he was young, a man did not always know, when he left home, with what pack he should hunt; but that, if he got up to some high ground, such as Popham Beacons for instance, he would be pretty sure to hear hounds, of some kind or other, running. And when he was asked whether such numerous packs did not sometimes interfere with each other, he replied: 'Well, it might just come to this—that they who got first found their fox or their hare, and they that came afterwards had none to find.'

The following story will show how harriers at least might, in those days, clash with each other:—

About the year 1795, a period when many foreign potentates were uprooted from their native soil, and transplanted for a while into England, there was lodging at Dummer, in obscurity and I fear in poverty, a German prince. One day he chanced to fall in with some hounds in the act of killing a hare just outside a wood; no horseman was in sight, and the prince, glad to secure such an unexpected dainty for his dinner, took away the hare, and was proceeding joyfully homewards when, at a sudden turn of the road, he unluckily fell in with my father with a few couples of small beagles which he then kept. The prince, who perhaps had not much eye for a hound, imagined that he stood detected before the master of the same pack that he had robbed; so, with admirable presence of mind, he made a virtue of necessity, and, presenting

the hare to my father, explained to him, in the best English that he could command, how he had saved the game from the jaws of the dogs, and how delighted he was to have this opportunity of restoring it to Monsieur; but as my father, far from having killed, had not even found a hare that morning, the truth necessarily came out to the great discomfiture of the prince. I do not recollect whether the hounds, which he had thus defrauded of their blood, were Mr. Terry's or Mr. Digweed's, nor am I able to say who finally ate the hare.

It is also certain that, quite in the beginning of this century, at least* four packs of foxhounds were drawing covers within the limits which now form the H. H. and the Vine countries, the former country being then divided between the H. H. and Mr. Russell, the successor of Lord Stawell, and the latter between Mr. Chute and Mr. Poyntz; while a few years earlier a pack of foxhounds had been kept by Mr. Smith at Cruxeaston. I can therefore well believe that when the old farmer was young there might have been many packs of foxhounds, as well as of harriers, which would be continually running into each other's countries, and in some cases drawing the same cover, a practice of which a remnant still exists in the

* I say '*at least four*,' because Mr. Powlett also at one time hunted the Freefolk wood country, in which he is reported to have had a remarkable continuance of good sport; but I have never been able to ascertain whether this was while he was master of the H. H., or when he was keeping a separate pack at Lainston House. If the latter were the case, then there was a third pack of foxhounds within the present limits of the Vine Hunt, for it is certain that at the same time Mr. Poyntz had possession of the Aldermaston and Kingsclere woodlands.

neutral covers which continue to be drawn by different packs.

It must, however, be admitted that, on the other hand, there were instances of the same pack occupying large tracts of country for a long period. The foundations of the Craven country must have been laid a hundred and forty years ago by Fulwar Lord Craven; and as he and his two next successors kept the hounds for about half a century continuously, their family influence and long possession enabled them to draw together the extensive country which they bequeathed to the members of the Craven Hunt. But I imagine that much of this was acquired gradually; for if Fulwar Lord Craven had occupied it all, he would scarcely have brought his hounds to Dummer, as he certainly did, about the middle of the last century. Nor is this the only instance of packs thus migrating from one distant quarter to another; for a gentleman is still living who remembers Lord Stawell bringing his hounds from his home country near Farnham to Andover. It is probable that, though foxes were plentiful in some districts, yet they were not then spread so equably over the whole country as they are in these days of artificial preserving. The venerable founder of the H. H., Mr. Ridge, is said to have kept hounds for forty-six years (from 1749 to 1795), and to have hunted from Farnham to Romsey. It was an extraordinary length of time for the same person to have hunted the same country, and it spread over nearly the whole period that the three successive Lords Craven kept their hounds; but I believe there is no doubt of the fact, and that the books of the H. H. contain authentic evidence of it.

It is, however, rather difficult to understand exactly what is meant by the tradition that Mr. Ridge hunted from Farnham to Romsey. It cannot mean that he regularly hunted all that extent of country during the whole forty-six years, because it is well known that, for many years previous to 1795, Lord Stawell drew the country from Farnham to Hackwood, and Mr. Gilbert the Romsey and Hursley country. But I suppose that what is meant is this—that there were times, during those forty-six years, when there was no impediment to Mr. Ridge going where he liked within those limits; that, in point of fact, he really did at times hunt over the whole; and that, by so doing, he may be supposed to have established a claim for the H. H. over all that extent of country. But this could only have been done by migrating, in the manner that I have already mentioned, from one kennel to another. It is clearly impossible that so large a tract could have been reached from any one centre, especially in days when hounds were expected to be at the cover's side soon after daybreak.

On the whole, whether we consider the manner in which some packs were crowded together, or the tracts of country which were left either quite unoccupied, or only occasionally visited, I think we shall come to one conclusion—namely, the extreme irregularity of hunting arrangements one hundred years ago, compared with the practice of the present age.

I think also that it is easy to show that hounds, in those days, required fewer foxes, and therefore less country, supposing it to be equally well stocked, than are now necessary for the same number of days' hunting.

In the first place, the earlier hour at which they hunted, often leaving the kennel in the dark, and reaching the cover's side soon after daybreak, made it easy for them to find all the foxes that were in the country. If one only had been moving about the cover during the night, they were sure to get on his drag, and, if he was anywhere above ground, could scarcely fail to find him. It is not too much to say that the present generation hunt during altogether a different portion of the twenty-four hours from that used by their great grandfathers. *Now* the majority of foxes are found after twelve o'clock; *then* the majority had been either killed or lost before that hour. It was towards the close of the last century, when the hour of meeting was probably nine o'clock, that an old sporting yeoman, who had hunted with three successive Lords Craven, was heard to express in coarse language the indignation which he conceived the first of them would feel if he could look out of his grave and see his degenerate descendants going out at so late an hour. 'We,' he added, 'took care to be by the cover's side by peep of day; and we went home again to dinner before one o'clock, and so we got a good long afternoon for drinking.'

Next we must take into account how much less frequently a second fox was required. Hounds were slower, and horses were slower, and, accordingly, the average of runs must have been longer. They neither killed nor lost their fox so quickly as modern packs do. They must often have had two or three hours' running by eleven o'clock. But even if the run had been shorter, I believe that, after killing one fox with fair sport, our ancestors were seldom disposed to draw

for another. To take hounds home on their blood was a favourite maxim with them ; and therefore they usually left off, not only actually earlier, but earlier compared with their hour of meeting than is now customary. Beckford says that he would never draw for a fresh fox after one o'clock, yet he intimates that he did not meet at so early an hour as some did, nor so early as he himself considered desirable for hounds. Even in my recollection there has been a change in that respect. In my youth, a master of hounds was thought justified in declining to draw again if a fox had been killed after a fair hour's run. I have known both Mr. Chute and Mr. Villebois act on this rule, and leave off between twelve and one o'clock.

Now compare all this with present usages. Hounds now throw off at eleven o'clock. By that time there can be no drag to assist hounds in finding. The men must trust to the chance, that they and the hounds between them may walk up a fox, and get him upon his legs. They can draw none but the most likely places, and have no clue to guide them to those foxes,—numerous when a country has been much disturbed, and particularly well worth finding,—that lie in strange out-of-the-way places. The huntsman now knows of the existence of such foxes only by hearing that one has been accidentally moved by greyhounds or shepherds' dogs, or by finding that his hounds have changed, he knows not where, in running across the open. Consequently, whereas nearly every fox within the boundaries of a hunt was formerly available for sport, in these days a pack must draw well, and have good luck to find half of them.

But even this difference, great as it is, is trifling

compared with the consumption of country caused by the practice of drawing very late in the day, which, in some hunts, is now carried to an excess. After a fox has been killed between two and three o'clock with a considerable run, hounds are kept drawing for another till it is nearly dark : long lines of covers are stained, and rendered useless for some weeks ; and at last, perhaps, a good fox is moved when there is not light enough to do anything with him. I do not mean to say that this is wrong (provided always that the country is sufficiently large and well stocked to bear it without producing blanks), any more than I say that it is wrong to meet at eleven o'clock, in conformity to modern habits ; I am only pointing out the inevitable effects of these changes. The custom of having a second horse out, scarcely ever practised in my youth, may save those animals from being injured by such long days ; while I believe that foxhounds in good condition will endure almost any amount of work to which they are accustomed without suffering. They will only require longer rest before they hunt again, and a more numerous pack must be kept. But the consumption of country caused by this late drawing is undeniable ; it will be as if the pack hunted an additional day in the week ; and, taking both these changes into account, I believe that a pack of foxhounds now require twice as much country, and at least three times as many foxes, as our ancestors found necessary for the same number of hunting days.

To these speculations upon former times I can add one fact which may be interesting to the naturalist. I believe that the martin-cat became extinct in the

woods of Hampshire somewhere about the close of the last century. I began to hunt and to be observant of such matters in 1814, but I never witnessed nor heard of a single instance of that animal being found by hounds; whereas, in the preceding generation, this was a frequent source of disappointment to sportsmen. The steadiest foxhounds would run this scent, and on such occasions they were generally supposed to have found a fox, till they were heard baying round some tree on which the creature had taken refuge. My father, when a boy, had sometimes climbed the tree for the purpose of shaking or beating it down. One would have supposed that the fate of the little animal, dropping down amongst twenty couples of expectant dogs, must have been certain and immediate; yet Beckford declares that there are few instances of a martin-cat being caught in such a situation—and he must have had considerable experience of them, for they were so plentiful in his country that he sometimes entered his young hounds to them. My father's testimony confirmed this assertion. He told me that they usually escaped by creeping and turning quickly under the bellies of the hounds. When found in a thick furze-brake, free from trees, they would baffle hounds for a long time, and occasionally beat them by running in thick places where the hounds could scarcely penetrate.





LETTER II.

OLD STORIES.

THE old stories to which this letter is devoted are of various dates, and stand on very different degrees of evidence. Like the earliest records in some graver histories, they seem to commence in the legendary age, and to have something mythic about them; but they will be found to improve both in internal probability and in external evidence as they proceed, till they arrive at the period when I can myself guarantee their truth.

Fulwar, the first of the three Lords Craven of whom I have made mention, was a mighty hunter, and kept foxhounds from about the year 1740 till his death in 1764. During part of that period he used to bring his hounds every season to Dummer, and hunt the adjoining country. It was from this kennel that the extraordinary but well-authenticated circumstance occurred, which I have read, when a boy, in some book of natural history, though I know not where to find it now. Two or three draft hounds had been sent by Lord Craven to Blair Athol in Scotland, and had been taken part of the way by sea, but found

their way back to the kennel at Dummer in some marvellously short space of time.*

In those times, and long afterwards, Nutley (in the Vine Country), was famous for producing long runs. A large tract adjoining that cover, towards Frost Hill, was then a rabbit warren: I can just remember the rabbits, as well as the old gates and palings. I think the land was brought under the plough before the year 1810, under the stimulus of war prices. These rabbits attracted foxes from all quarters, and those who had the luck to escape the warrener's traps would naturally take up their quarters in Nutley or Kingsdown, and, when found by hounds, go back to their old haunts far away.

Now there is a legend that, one season, Lord Craven had frequently found a fox at Nutley who always beat him by going to ground in Petersfield Hanger, which must be considerably more than twenty miles from Nutley. He took the same line every time; and there was a field, a little beyond Preston Oakhills, which he never failed to go through. So, one fine hunting morning, his lordship sent on servants, with hounds

* A relation of mine knew of an instance somewhat similar. A neighbour of his, who kept harriers on the Cotswold Hills, had sent a hound to a pack in Essex, about twenty miles beyond London. The hound had been taken through London; I do not know whether on foot or in a carriage. When he was taken out with the pack in Essex, he was observed to be with them when the first hare was killed, but was missed soon afterwards. Some time in the next day, he was found at his old kennel in Gloucestershire. Both these cases seem to prove that dogs are directed to their point by some inexplicable instinct, though they know nothing of the intermediate space which they have to traverse.

and horses, to lie in wait near that spot, while he went with another pack to Nutley, where he found his old friend as usual. As soon as the fox showed himself in the well-known field the fresh hounds were laid on; the men, as they came up, mounted their fresh horses, and by means of this sharp practice the ill-used animal was killed just as he was reaching the earths at Petersfield Hanger. This story was told to my father by an old gentleman of the neighbourhood who professed to have been in the run. He was not a person remarkable for veracity, but I think he would hardly have invented the tale, though he may have embellished it.

In the days of the last William Lord Craven, a pack of foxhounds was kept at Cruxeaston, as I mentioned in my first letter. Their master was known by the name of 'Dick Smith.' There seems to be something in the name of Smith which ensures superiority in the hunting field. We have known it combined with the names of Assheton and Thomas; but the popular sportsman of that generation was 'Dick Smith.' It was usual to compare his pack with the more costly establishment of the neighbouring peer, rather to the disparagement of the latter. This feeling seems to have found its expression in the following whimsical story:—

One day, Lord Craven, being on rather bad terms with his fox in Highclere Park, asked a labourer whether he had seen the fox. The man, being a wag, and sharing the popular opinion as to the superiority of Mr. Smith's hounds, replied, 'O aye, I seen un, and he stopped and had a bit of chat with me.' 'Indeed,' said Lord Craven, 'and what did he say to you?' 'Why, he axed me if I could tell un, whether it was

my Lord's hounds or the Squire's, as was a'ter un : so I told un it was most likely my Lord's, abin* the Squire was out yesterday. Ah ! says he, I thought so : that's just how 'tis : that's the reason why I can stop and have a bit of chat with you ; abin, you see, when the Squire is a'ter me, I never have no time to spare.' But the remainder of the story records, with great impartiality, how Lord Craven got the laugh on his side at last ; for he killed the fox, and, on his return home through Highclere Park, told the labourer that his friend had staid chatting with him too long.

I do not pretend to guarantee the truth of either of these tales ; like the old minstrel,

I cannot say how the truth may be,
I tell the tale, as 'twas told to me.

But I have no doubt of the truth of the following circumstances relating to Lord Stawell and his men, for I had them from my father, who had hunted with him, and whose accuracy might be depended on.

Lord Stawell kept a capital pack of foxhounds, and occupied the eastern and northern parts of the present H. H. Country, together with some parts now hunted by Mr. Garth. He resided in the Holt Forest, between Alton and Farnham, but used to stay a good deal with the last Duke of Bolton at Hackwood. He lived to the year 1820, but had discontinued hunting a few years before the end of the last century.

His pack was exceedingly well managed. Harrison the huntsman, and Sharpe the first whipper-in, were excellent sportsmen, and worked well together. If

* In my youth, the old Hampshire peasants still used the word '*abin*' for '*because*.'

hounds came away from a cover on Sharpe's side, he was competent to hunt them, and would always fall back into his right place, when Harrison came up; while Harrison, quite free from jealousy, and satisfied that all was right whilst Sharpe was forward, would come on quietly waiting for a turn in his favor, instead of distressing his horse by trying to catch hounds.

The Duke of York (brother to George IV.) at one time kept a pack of foxhounds at Weybridge, and had obtained permission, I know not from whom, for some days' hunting in what is now the Vine Country. Lord Stawell went to meet them from Hackwood, much displeased at their coming, because he apprehended that the same favor might next be asked from him. Accordingly he was in no very gracious mood, and when on his return to dinner at Hackwood he was asked his opinion of the pack, he is reported to have replied, 'Sir, they are worse than you can possibly imagine; they can neither draw, nor run, nor hunt: they all stink, and want brimstone; there is only one dog amongst them that looks in the least like a foxhound; and the only thing worth going out for was to hear old Squire Harwood grumbling and cursing the huntsman for a fool.'

Between the years 1788 and 1795, George IV., then Prince of Wales, rented Kempshott, and hunted deer. He wished to have Sharpe for his huntsman. Lord Stawell informed the man of the promotion offered him: but Sharpe declined it; he urged that he had a good place already; that he was fond of foxhunting, and knew that he could give satisfaction at it; but that he knew nothing of staghunting, and did not at all fancy it. Lord Stawell is said to have replied to

this effect. ‘That is all very well, Sharpe, but that is not the point. You do not want to go, and I do not want to lose you; but neither you nor I must say no to a Prince; you must take the offer, and if you continue steady and respectable, it may be the making of your fortune.’ What makes this story interesting is, that it gives the origin of a dynasty which has continued to this day, more than seventy years since the conversation must have taken place. Sharpe became huntsman to the Prince, and on the breaking-up of his hunting establishment retired for awhile from the royal service on a pension. During this time he was huntsman to Mr. Hanbury in the Puckeridge Country, and I believe to some other master of hounds: but in 1813 the Duke of Richmond, leaving England to take the government of Canada, presented his celebrated pack of foxhounds to the Prince of Wales, then Prince Regent. This was a great era in the history of the Royal hunt. The old heavy staghounds, with which King George III. had delighted to gallop leisurely over the yet uninclosed country between Sandhurst and Bray, were discarded; the old fashioned yeomen prickers shared their fate. All the foreign accessories of hunting, which had prevailed, I suppose, since the days of William III., were swept away; and Sharpe, recalled to the Royal service, came out as huntsman to a pack of light, quick foxhounds, attended with his whippers-in, a style as nearly resembling English foxhunting as staghunting can possibly assume. The well-known Mr. Davis married his daughter, and still holds the office of huntsman to the Royal staghounds, which he may be considered as having inherited from his father-in-law. All who have seen a print of Mr.

Davis must know that his seat and figure present a perfect model of a horseman, and all who have conversed with him will agree in thinking that his dignified civility of manner, equally respectful and self-respecting, is exactly adapted to his position, as the head of the hunting servants of England.

The Prince, before he left Kempshott, attempted to make his staghounds hunt fox, of which I must say more hereafter. I believe that this did not continue long; probably it was in the season of 1794-5. The first attempt was made by turning down a bag-fox at Southington Scrubs. On this occasion, a sportsman in that country, a fussy man, who liked to make himself of consequence, took upon himself to lecture Sharpe, who, be it remembered, had been whipper-in to a first-rate pack of foxhounds, as to how he should proceed. 'Now, Sharpe, you must take care to kill him, whatever you do; never mind about sport to-day, your business is to give your hounds blood. If I were you, *I* would not give him more than five minutes law.' Sharpe's brief answer was a complete set-down. 'You make yourself easy, and keep quiet; I am not going to give him more than *one*.'*

In December, 1808 (or 1809), occurred a very extraordinary run with some harriers, belonging to Mr. Jervoise, of Heriard House; the same gentleman who,

* Having written down these anecdotes from memory, fifty years after I had heard them from my father, I had lately an opportunity of asking Mr. Davis whether he thought them correct. He told me that he had often heard Sharpe himself tell the story of his retort in Southington Scrubs, nearly in the same words; and that every thing else which I related about Lord Stawell and Sharpe was quite consistent with what he knew of his father-in-law's life.

in 1820, succeeded Mr. Chute as Member for the county of Hants. It was communicated to me by Mr. Terry, now living near Maidenhead—the only man who saw it.

The hounds were in Mr. Jervoise's cover, Henwood, when Mr. Terry viewed away a fox, closely pursued by three couple and a half of the hounds. As he was alone, and down wind, and it was a windy mizzling day, Mr. Terry was unable to make himself heard, and went away alone. He crossed the Alton Road, near Winslade, and went along Ellisfield Down, by Moundsmore Farm, leaving the Oakhills to his left, and straight on in the direction of Medsted. Here, however, Mr. Terry got out of his knowledge, and can give little account of the line taken. He seems to have crossed the Alresford Road, between Windmill Hill and Ropley, but he does not know at what point he crossed the Gosport Road. At last he found himself, according to the statement of a labourer, within two miles of Petersfield. Here hounds and fox were together in a wheat field, but both parties so exhausted, that neither could mend their pace: it was like the conclusion of the celebrated chase in the *Lady of the Lake*—

Nor nearer could the dogs attain,
Nor farther could the quarry strain ;—

till Mr. Terry, having a little still left in his horse, was able to head the fox into the hounds' mouths. During this extraordinary run, which lasted about three hours, and could scarcely have been accomplished in less than twenty miles, no one joined him. Seven hounds and one horseman, not in scarlet, might

slip through a country without attracting notice of eye or ear. It is more remarkable that the hounds never checked, but hung on the scent throughout; but it is to be observed that they had the advantage of running from a worse into a better scenting country, so that the scent probably increased in proportion as the hounds declined in strength. After giving himself, his horse, and his little pack food and rest at Alresford, Mr. Terry reached the kennel at Heriard between ten and eleven o'clock; but it must have been near midnight before he regained his own home near Tunworth. Mr. Terry added that these seven hounds ever afterwards showed an attachment to him, and would leave the pack and come round his horse whenever he hunted with them.

A little before I began to hunt, a man named Cowley had been Mr. Chute's huntsman. I was told that he was a very good one; and that, as George Hickson, who was whipper-in to him, was excellent in that office, the pack had been very successful during this period. A curious circumstance took place while Cowley was huntsman.

There was a gentleman well known in the hunt who was a very good sportsman, but who, having been bred a harehunter, entertained some notions which sounded heretical in the ears of orthodox foxhunters. Amongst others, he held that horseflesh was unnecessary and injurious to foxhounds; that they would be quite up to their work, and undoubtedly have tenderer noses if they were fed only on oatmeal. Mr. Chute's brother partly believed this, and between them they persuaded the Squire to give the thing a trial. In order to put the theory to the severest test,

a day was chosen when they were to meet at Freefolk Wood, twelve miles off, and by no means the easiest of covers to encounter. On the previous day, the two Mr. Chutes saw the hounds fed on their vegetable diet, in order to be secure against any mistake; but as soon as they were safe in the house again, Cowley said, 'Now, George, I tell you how it is, I won't stand this nonsense; I am not going to take my hounds to Freefolk Wood on this catlap;' and immediately he threw down to the hounds some raw horseflesh which he had cut up for the purpose. It chanced that the hounds killed their fox handsomely at the end of a very long day's work, to the great delight of the gentleman who had suggested the experiment, and who naturally considered it a conclusive proof of the soundness of his theory. It is probable that no one ever knew this secret till many years afterwards. George, who, after Mr. Chute's death, became coachman to his widow, confided it to me as we were sitting together in the barouche box, driving over Rooksdown. I imagine, however, that this whim was not repeated. Certainly, in my time, there was no want of horseflesh, nor any deficiency in the condition of the hounds.

It is amongst the earliest of my hunting recollections that Mr. Chute once gave Mr. St. John a few days' hunting in his country. I think it must have been about the year 1812 or 1813 that I saw Mr. St. John find a fox at Waltham Wood, and after running through Ashe Park, Dean Wood, and Nutley, lose him in the open fields behind Quidhampton. Full thirty years afterwards, as I was sitting with Mr. St. John at the Board of Guardians, in the old Townhall of Wokingham, I asked him if he recollected the circum-

stance. His answer amused me : ‘ Recollect it ! to be sure, I do. Now, do you know, I never could make out to this day, where that fox could have gone to ;’ as if he had been thinking of it ever since.

I cannot put the date of my personal observation of Mr. Chute’s hounds later back than the season 1813-14, though I had been out with them occasionally earlier. At that time, George Hickson had become the huntsman. The first good run that I remember was on the breaking up of the long frost of that season, while the ground was still rotten, and the snow lying on the north side of the fences ; but there was a great scent. The meet was at Shothanger, which was then a larger wood than it is now. After a sharp, short burst in the morning, the hounds found a second fox somewhere near Hannington ; went down Freemantle Hill, over the common fields between Kingsclere and Wolverton, and, after two hours very hard running, killed at Harridens. On that day I first saw with hounds Mr. Thomas Smith, since so well known as the head of the Hambledon, the Craven, and the Pytcheley Hunts ; one of the best riders, and decidedly the ablest huntsman that I ever saw. He was then a very young man, and probably did not know an inch of the country, for he lived twenty miles off, and chanced, I think, to be staying at the Vine ; but his performances that day were worthy of his future fame. He rode his grey mare straight down Freemantle Hill, probably the safest way, but one which no one else had nerve enough to attempt, as the fourteen weeks’ frost was not out of that northern slope. Everyone else dismounted, and men and horses were seen separately sliding down on their re-

spective haunches. Of course Mr. Smith went away by himself, nor was there much better chance of catching him when he got amongst the small enclosures and large fences of the woodlands. For myself, a raw schoolboy, on a rawer four-year-old pony, I rode in a state of great excitement, chiefly along lanes—in which, however, I must plead in excuse that most of my seniors were with me—content to catch sight now and then of a tail hound crossing a road, till at last we found Mr. Smith standing alone in a green space in the middle of Harridens, with the brush in his hand, and the hounds breaking up the fox around him. I returned home with an ear of the animal in my pocket; for the pads had all been appropriated by my betters, fully believing the whipper-in's solemn assurance that, 'next to the brush, *the lug* was the most *sporting* part of the fox, and well convinced that I had been taking a part in the most glorious achievement ever performed by hounds.

It happened that on May 6, 1814, after regular hunting had ceased, by some arrangement between the two masters, Mr. Chute's hounds were to have a private meet at Mr. Villebois' cover, Chilton Wood. My father was invited to it. He was then preparing me at home for Winchester School, and, to my great disappointment, declined the invitation; but in order to console me wrote the following lines, which though destitute of the poetry which is to be found in some of his compositions, yet contains plenty of good sense.

'Why must this day be spent in books?'
If I interpret right his looks,
My Edward seems to say:

‘Why rest our horses in the stable,
To carry us completely able,
Oh, why not hunt to-day?’

I’ll tell you, boy, at once my reason ;
‘For all on earth there is a season,’
So said an ancient prince,
Who had for wisdom some small credit ;
And that with perfect truth he said it,
Experience will convince.

When corn is housed, and fields are clear ;
And Autumn’s various tints appear,
None more enjoy than I
To see the pack diffusely spread,
Or jostling press to gain the lead
With loud and cheerful cry.

The farmer then no cares molest,
He rides and halloos with the rest
Across his very farm ;
And if a field of new-sprung wheat
Just feel the print of horse’s feet,
He knows we do no harm.

But when the wheat is higher grown,
And pease and oats and barley sown,
And fences made up tight,
To gallop all the country over,
And cut up sainfoin, corn, and clover,
Is neither fair nor right.

And small the joy, when new-sown grounds,
And dry roads puzzling oft the hound,
All hope of sport present ;
When violets in hedgerows growing,
And primroses in copses blowing
Must take away the scent.

Besides, thus still to persevere
In hunting almost round the year
Has but an awkward look ;
Might lead our neighbours to suspect,
That all improvement we neglect,
And rarely touch a book.

Then over bank and hedge and ditch,
Let Members great and Brewers rich
Bound, the fleet pack to follow ;
Leading by turns the varying crash,
Let Haughty and let Gamester dash,
And George to Welcome halloo.

Let you and me meanwhile, my boy,
In work at home our hours employ,
And learn what we are able ;
At Winton else you'll roughly fare,
When you are placed beneath the care
Of Dr. Henry Gabell.

And when at Christmas, Wykeham's rule
Sends boys from Homer and from school,
To ponies and mincepies ;
O may no frost your sport prevent,
But hazy, mild, and good for scent
Be January's skies.

May you, in every rapid burst,
Be near enough, though not the first,
Each leading hound to mark ;
And, when with eager haste they fling.
Light bounding o'er the Ha Ha spring
That fences Farley Park.

If near they meet, and fine the weather,
We will a gallop take together,
But do not wait for me :
The time has been when to be last
I should have scorned, but that is past,
And ne'er again can be.

About the lanes I'll ride and skirt,
And sometimes be well splashed with dirt,
By half the passing field :
If quite thrown out, I'll home return,
Well satisfied from you to learn,
In what a style they killed.

And now having given my ideas concerning the
hunting of the last century, and having finished this


miscellany of Old Stories, I must turn to the graver work of history. I must first try to trace out the origin of the Vine Hunt; next, give some account of the hounds, horses, and men, as I first knew them myself in the year 1814; and, lastly, record the history of the pack from Mr. Chute's death in 1824, to the time when I left off hunting in 1834.





LETTER III.

THE ORIGIN OF THE VINE HUNT.

 NOW propose to trace out the origin of Mr. Chute's foxhounds, and the boundaries of the countries which he hunted at different times; and also to ascertain who was his immediate predecessor in each portion of them. No other parts of my letters are likely to give me half the trouble which this has done. I doubt whether Mr. Chute ever hunted up to a fox on the coldest scent more laboriously than I have worked, in searching in various quarters for facts almost buried in oblivion, and in guarding myself from asserting anything that did not rest on good authority. However, by the aid of some kind friends, I think I have been enabled to establish all the three points that I have mentioned.

The hounds first kept by Mr. Chute were large harriers; though it is probable that both he and they, according to the irregular habits of those days, were quite willing to go after a fox whenever they might chance to come across one. He seems to have changed the character of his pack gradually, procuring draft foxhounds, and retaining some of his harriers to run with them; but never, so far as I can learn, breeding

from the latter. Soon after Mr. Chute commenced foxhunting, the Prince of Wales took the fancy which I mentioned in my last letter of hunting foxes instead of stags; and Mr. Chute was required to give up to his Royal Highness the country which he had so lately acquired. With much reluctance he complied, and again condescended to hare-hunting, not changing his pack, but making a reduced number of the same hounds hunt hare. But this state of things did not last long; scarcely, I believe, through an entire season. The Prince never fully occupied the country which he had induced Mr. Chute to resign; and though professing to hunt foxes, never entirely left off stag-hunting. Nor was he very likely to go much into the Vale. The rough Hampshire woodlands would have little attraction to one whose chief object in hunting was an appetising gallop before dinner. There is no *royal road* through Bramley Frith, or Newlands, any more than there is through Euclid. Accordingly, Mr. Chute soon found Pamber forest full of foxes, which had been driven from the hills. He and his pack were very willing to return to their old game. He procured fresh drafts of foxhounds, and declared, with a strong asseveration, that he would never again give up his country to prince, or peer, or peasant.

I obtained these particulars from Will. Biggs, who had been Mr. Chute's huntsman through all these changes, and had afterwards passed into the service of Mr. Villebois, master of the H.H., as feeder, and was then living on a pension from his latter master near my house, in Berkshire. I got this information from him about twenty years ago, at the request of Mr. Fellowes, then master of the Vine hounds, who

wished to ascertain the date whence their existence as a pack of foxhounds might be claimed. Will. Biggs was as like a fox as a man could well be, with sharp twinkling eyes, and a remarkably sly expression of countenance. I believe that he had been a clever huntsman. There was a story that, after he had killed nineteen foxes in succession, Mr. Chute turned him off for missing the twentieth. I need scarcely add that this was a mere joke, and that there were more valid reasons for discharging him. The old man looked back with great regard to this early pack, and evidently considered it to consist of more powerful and effective hounds than those which Mr. Chute afterwards bred.

I do not know exactly when Mr. Chute first began to keep harriers. In one of Nimrod's letters in the *Sporting Magazine* (April 1824), he speaks of him as having been a master of hounds from a boy. This can scarcely be literally true; because Mr. Chute had been no 'home-keeping youth,' but had spent his early years at Harrow and Cambridge, and on the Continent. It is certain, however, that he had kept harriers during his father's lifetime, and, I think, equally certain that he began to change them into foxhounds very soon after succeeding to the property in 1790. In the same article of the magazine it is stated, that Mr. Chute had at that time been a master of foxhounds for thirty-two years. This would take us back to the hunting season of 1791-2. As Mr. Apperly lived for two or three years near the Vine, I have little doubt that he obtained this date from Mr. Chute himself; and it agrees very well with the date which I should arrive at by the following calculation. Ac-

cording to the evidence of Will. Biggs, Mr. Chute had resumed hunting foxes, while the Prince was still at Kempshot, and it is known that the Prince ceased to reside there in 1795. Now the interval between 1791-2 and 1795 is not more than sufficient for all the changes that I have mentioned, viz. the first change from harriers to foxhounds; the brief return to hare-hunting; and the final resumption of foxhunting. I think, therefore, that we may fix on the season of 1791-2 as the date when they first became foxhounds, and the season of 1794-5 as the time when they finally ceased to hunt hare; so that, at any rate, the Vine Hunt may now claim an uninterrupted existence of seventy years.

Next to showing the origin of the pack, I have to trace out the countries which Mr. Chute occupied at different times; fix the dates of his occupation, and show who was his immediate predecessor in each; and for this task I happen to possess a peculiar advantage. Circumstances put me in possession of Mr. Chute's diary for the year 1798, in which are entered his places of meeting for the latter half of one season, and the first half of another. The authentic information supplied to me by the accidental preservation of this little pocket-book for nearly seventy years, seems to exemplify the truth of an old proverb, and to multiply it by ten, 'Keep a thing seven years, and you will be sure to find a use for it.'

From this document, confirmed as it is in parts by living testimony, it appears that Mr. Chute then drew all the covers north of the Great Western Turnpike Road, from Basingstoke to Nutley. His western and northern boundary included North Oakley and Han-

nington, with the Dean's woods, Ewhurst, Pamber, Ufton Park, Sulhamstead and Pinge wood ; his eastern boundary seems to have been formed by the River Loddon. On the south of the turnpike he drew the St. John's and Bull's bushes country; but he did not cross the lanes which run from Dean Gate to Popham Lane into what may be called the Freefolk wood country; nor did he draw the Pole's wood country, Wolverton, the Kingsclere woodlands, Aldermaston or Wasing. Mr. Chute seems to have been most frequently between Pamber and Sulhamstead, at which latter place he had an intimate friend and valuable supporter in the father of the present Mr. Thoyts. All that district was then far more favourable for hounds than it now is. It presented a wide extent of heath and scattered furze, with wet boggy bottoms; very little interrupted by enclosures and quite free from the fir plantations, which have now swallowed up so much of it. It seems also to have been well stocked with foxes, for I find that in February, 1798, the hounds met twice in one week at Mortimer, and killed a fox each day.

But, though Mr. Chute's diary proves that he drew the St. John's and Bull's bushes country, and though there is evidence* that Mr. Sclater Mathew drew them before him, yet I ought to mention that the H.H. conceived that they had a right to draw it also. I think it must have been as late as the year 1812 that Mr. Villebois, having run a fox into that country, drew those covers in his way home, for the purpose of

* Mr. Sclater Mathew's nephew, the present Mr. Sclater of Hoddington House, remembers that his uncle used to speak of St. John's wood as his favourite meet.

asserting that right. I well remember the disturbance which this caused amongst Mr. Chute's friends. The claim, however, was strenuously resisted by the owners of the woods at Manydown and Oakley Hall, and I do not believe that it was ever revived.

Mr. Chute's immediate predecessor in all, or* nearly all this country, was Mr. Sclater Mathew, an uncle of Mr. Sclater of Hoddington House, who kept a pack of foxhounds at Tangier Park. He lived to the year 1809, but had left off hunting many years before. I can just remember him, and also his old huntsman, John Adams, who remained as a sort of pensioner on the family, and practised as a farrier and cow doctor, whenever he was sober enough to exercise his calling. There is a story that, on one occasion, when he was especially drunk, he cut off a cow's tail at Oakley Hall, and sent it into the house on a plate, declaring that it would serve for Squire Bramston's dinner.

The country from Freefolk wood up to the road from Dean Gate to Popham Lane, seems to have been formerly separate from the rest of the present Vine country. As such it was once held by Mr. Powlett, though I am unable to say positively with what other country he united it, or exactly when he ceased to hunt it. However, my business is only to ascertain Mr. Chute's immediate predecessor, and it is certain that, quite at the beginning of the century, if not earlier, it was held by Mr. Poyntz, who united it with the Pole's wood country, the Kingsclere and Wolverton woodlands, Wasing, and Aldermaston. He hunted also

* I say *nearly* all, because I am not certain whether Mr. Sclater Mathew hunted as far towards the Kennet and the Loddon as Mr. Chute did.

good deal of country north of the Kennet, from his own house at Midgham, and must have possessed a narrow strip of great length, from Freefolk wood and Blackwood on the south to Bucklebury, if not farther, on the north. Mr. Poyntz was a gentleman of large property, and of a very old family. He was a very odd and whimsical character; but his eccentricities seem to have been of a kind and easy nature. I have been told that he was by no means a scrupulous respecter of boundaries; but that, as water will find its way into every vacant place, so his hounds were sure to appear wherever they were not carefully stopped out; but I suspect that this laxity of proceeding was a characteristic of the times rather than of the man. Mr. Poyntz was much with the Prince at Kempshot, a society for which he was quite qualified by his birth and connections; but perhaps, in common with some other gentlemen of the country, he did not come out, quite uninjured, from that Royal lion's den. For many seasons he used to bring his hounds to Overton, and establish himself at an inn, now pulled down, but which I remember by the name of the Poyntz's Arms. Here he, who had consorted with princes, made a crony of the landlord, old Paice; with whom, when he became too infirm for riding, he used to be driven in a chaise along the line which the hounds were to draw. I have heard from various quarters that the whole thing was strangely conducted. The master left the men, and the men left the hounds, very much to themselves. The huntsman was seldom sober: by the end of the day the hounds were usually scattered along the whole line of country which they had drawn; and the men were often content to return home with

such hounds as they could easily get together, leaving the rest to find their own way back to the kennel. It may be remembered that Beckford declares himself unable to enumerate all the evils which ensue when hounds are thus left behind.

On Mr. Poyntz's death, which took place in May, 1809, Mr. Chute came into possession of the Freefolk and Pole's wood country on the hills, and of Wolverton, the Kingsclere woodlands, Wasing, and Aldermaston in the Vale; so that his immediate predecessors in the Vine country were Mr. Sclater Mathew and Mr. Poyntz.

But probably few people know that Mr. Chute did, for a few seasons, occupy a country eastward of the Loddon, towards Hartley Row. I do not know how far he went in that direction; but there does not seem to have been any other pack just then to prevent his going as far as he pleased. This district must have formed part of the country hunted by Lord Stawell, and his successor, Mr. Russell*, who lived at Hodlington House, and kept his hounds at Greywell; then always pronounced 'Gruel.' In 1805, Mr. Russell gave up his country to Mr. Villebois, and the bulk of it became incorporated in the H.H. country. It is probable that the H.H. might plead an old right to it, on account of Mr. Ridge having hunted it before the establishment of Lord Stawell's pack. However this

* I remember Mr. Russell hunting regularly with the H. H. and occasionally with Mr. Chute: he was a fine looking old man with white hair, and was considered an authority on hunting matters. I remember also his lady, who hunted as regularly, attended by a well-mounted groom. She wore a dark skirted habit with a scarlet body, adorned with the H.H. button. I believe she was an honorary member of the club.

may be, the H.H. seemed not to have claimed, or at least not to have cared to go across the Turnpike road; so that this district remained vacant for Mr. Chute's occupation. I have heard George regret the loss of this country, where, he said, there was almost always scent enough to secure blood whenever it was wanted. But when Mr. St. John established his foxhounds, Mr. Chute gave up to him this district, together with a strip of country on the west of the Loddon, from Sherfield to Pinge wood, including Beech Hill and Strathfieldsaye. Mr. St. John purchased his foxhounds in 1810*, though he had previously attempted to kill foxes over the heaths with his harriers, aided by one steady old foxhound. The time, therefore, when Mr. St. John would have required this accommodation, agrees exactly with the time when Mr. Chute acquired, on the other side of his country, the places vacated by the death of Mr. Poyntz. All circumstances, therefore, agree in pointing out the year 1810 as that in which the Vine country acquired its present boundaries. Since that time it has experienced no permanent alterations. Some temporary changes took place, by mutual agreement between Mr. Assheton Smith, and Mr. Fellowes, as to the occupation of Wherwell, Doles and Doyley woods.† During the few seasons that the

* My authority for the time when Mr. St. John purchased his hounds is his son, the Rev. Edward St. John of West Court: my authority for his previous attempts at foxhunting with his harriers is his old friend and fellow sportsman, Mr. Blackall Simonds.

† In Mr. Fellowes' times, the Vine hunted several times at Crookham hangings, Sidmonton, and Adbury, but this was by no general permission, but only by special invitation for the day.

Earl of Portsmouth kept the Vine hounds, he held also some parts of the Craven country; but only by a temporary arrangement, and not so as to amalgamate the two countries together. Some of the oldest portions of the Vine country have, of late years, been occupied, by permission, by the South Berks. Blackwood has always been neutral between the Vine and the H.H. The triangle formed by Knightsbridge, Kingsclere, and Dairy House, including Frow Park, has always been neutral between the Vine and the Craven; but with these exceptions, the Vine country has been held unchanged, in undisputed possession for more than fifty years. I have, indeed, heard of other masters of foxhounds of a still earlier date, occupying the same countries. Of Lord Craven, Lord Stawell, and Mr. Smith of Cruxeaston, I have already made mention. I believe, though I am not certain, that previous to the days of Mr. Sclater Mathew, a predecessor of his, Mr. Limbrey, kept foxhounds at Tangier, in the old days, when it was a deer park: I have also heard my father speak of a Mr. Evelyn, a descendant of the celebrated John Evelyn, a very polished and popular gentleman, who kept hounds somewhere in that neighbourhood. But all these are like shadowy objects looming indistinctly through a fog, of which I am unable to fix the outlines. I have told all that I can hope to establish as authentic history; and I shall be well content if I have been able to show, on good evidence,—

1st. The origin of the Vine hounds.

2nd. The countries occupied by them at different times.

3rd. Mr. Chute's immediate predecessor in each portion of his country.

I shall close this letter with an account of a long run from Pamber Forest to Laverstock wood, written by Mr. Chute to his brother Thomas, then a captain in the Hants Light Dragoons, stationed at Lewes. The run took place on Tuesday, Nov. 20, 1798, within a few days of my birth. The original letter is in my possession.

‘The Vyne, Wednesday.

‘Dear Bro :

‘Such a touch yesterday as never seen before in my time. At $\frac{1}{2}$ past twelve (a hard frosty morning), found his honor of immense size in the long copse in Spring Lane in Pamber forest, with a pretty little drag. Will talio'd him across y^e lane, but hounds would not come to halloo, however, with very bad scent, only 2 or 3 dogs owning it, hunted him by Timber gate and to y^e Turnpike road, for Lee Copse, and back through y^e forest, by Gander brook, along y^e hollow copse on left of Spring Lane. This took $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour, recovered him in y^e copse next y^e mill, on right of Lord's Lane, came off at his brush, y^e same track back, but came to picking thro' y^e Forest, till we crossed y^e Turnpike, and then came prettily for Lee Copse, Taddy Place, and down to Witch Lane, where I believe he stopped again, for he was only 2 or 3 minutes before them over West Heath, where the water flew beautifully whilst they caught it carrying a head, and took a burst to Hanington Scrubs, where we overtook them. I think you will say, pretty well, but it is nothing to what I have to say. Going thro' Macreth's copse on this side

the water, I stopped to get Will's mare over the rails, and so lost the fine run over y^e Lawn*, and to y^e top of his shrubbery, when I overtook Curtis, and heard y^e curs going into y^e Dean's Woods, down y^e hill and thro' y^e wood into second long field, across to y^e gap into y^e heavy stony field that was turnips last year, up to y^e barn. Here I stopped Black Mare for wind, but she soon recovered, and spun up y^e steep stony lane for Hanington, where I overtook them going into first scrubs all together, but rather slack. He turned then into y^e green lane again, at this end of the second scrubs, to y^e end of it, and then bore for Canon Park, hunting it across fallows, in y^e open, curs recovered their wind and laid on again, but came to a fault by overrunning it in a path (from Hannington Scrubs to y^e end he seemed at a loss as he could not find a gap and run down the hedges instead of topping them and not going straight). Here a halloo on y^e Warren showed Will's stupidity, for instead of going as he ought up to the man with hounds close by him, he encourages them to spread, by which means away they go after rabbits, and then on forward where the

* The lawn and shrubbery of Ewhurst, where lived Sir Robert Macreth, an Indian Nabob. Two men, named Macreth and Rumbold, after having been fellow-servants at an hotel in London, acquired large fortunes in India; but Rumbold, who had been the under-servant in England, became the richer and greater of the two in India. This change in their relations to each other was celebrated in the following epigram:—

When Bob Macreth, with upper-servant's pride,
'Here fellow, clean my shoes,' to Rumbold cried,
He meekly answered, 'Yea, Bob.'
But since returned from India's plundered land,
The purse-proud Rumbold, at the same command,
Would stoutly answer, 'Na-Bob.'

man pointed for the chance of getting y^e scent, so we were left at a loss where to find it, back to y^e man and then forward again, and at last casting beyond the Warren, we got on again slowish, but pretty hunting over North Oakley Down, thro' Nutley, Kingsdown to Quidhampton, back of Lefroy's* house, cross over y^e Turnpike at y^e hill beyond Lefroy's to y^e cottage in y^e lane, and up y^e lane thro' y^e copse, I believe this is Burydown, next to Ash Park, left Bramdown, y^e large wood to y^e left (I don't know which is which of Burydown, Bramdown and Burleigh), and took y^e open country at back of Overton, turned to y^e left (large fields) thro' Quidham, Southleys, and across to Laverstock Wood, where y^e sun down, all animals moving, we had 2 or 3 scents, and so called away,—had there been light I think we must have killed, curs not tired, and fox ran four hours and a half, and frost against us in the hill. Curtis dished, Black Mare worth any money, Vanity (Ld. Eg.) incomparable, y^e old hounds kept us back very often.

‘Yours, in haste,

‘W. CHUTE.’

This letter may be considered interesting, not only as a specimen of Mr. Chute's style of writing, but as indicating the state of the hunt in those early days, through which I have been attempting to trace it.

It implies the scantiness of the field. No one figured in this long run but Curtis, the landlord of the Angel Inn at Basingstoke. I have been told that he was, about this time, by far the most constant attendant in

* Lefroy's house was Ashe Parsonage.

the field, and that he was often useful in assisting the hounds. It betrays the imperfect constitution of the pack, consisting probably of drafts from different kennels, with some unsteady hounds flashing at rabbits, and some old and worn-out ones keeping the others back. It incidentally confirms the fact that Mr. Chute did not then possess the Freefolk wood country; for he describes minutely the woods and fields up to the turnpike road at Ashe; but as soon as he has passed that boundary, he is uncertain as to the names of some of the principal covers, because he had got out of his own country.





LETTER IV.

THE HOUNDS AND HORSES.

WHATEVER might have been the style of hound with which Mr. Chute began his fox-hunting career, he had brought them to the standard which he desired before I began to observe them. Mr. Chute, though by no means a good sportsman in the field, had a nice eye both for the shape and the condition of a hound; and, at any rate, knew precisely the kind of animal which he himself preferred; and certainly he succeeded in breeding a pack peculiar in their shape and character, and exceedingly well adapted for the country in which they were to work. They were very small, or, at least, very low. The dogs were about twenty-one inches in height, the bitches about nineteen or twenty, though I have known him enter some much lower. But, as it has often been said that the size of a horse has little to do with his height, so the real power of Mr. Chute's hounds was far greater than these measurements would indicate. They were long and deep in the body, with backs slightly arched, excellent fore-legs and feet, and the very best set of loins and thighs that I ever saw got together. They were all bone and muscle, without any lumber to carry, and I never

saw a coarse or throaty hound amongst them. Mr. Chute loved to boast no man could make his finger and thumb meet round the arm of his model dog, Larkspur, yet Larkspur was by no means the tallest dog in the kennel. They were perhaps rather too short in the neck: the back part of the head was broad, the nose long and pointed; and as the kennel mark was a slit cut in the upper lip, there was a peculiarly sharp expression in their countenance. In colour they were very dark, of rich tan and black, but many of them had small white flecks sprinkled, like snow flakes, over their black and tan coats. A yellow or badger-pied hound was rarely seen amongst them; and Mr. Chute had a peculiar aversion to a hound who had one side of the head and face white. I remember his entering one such who proved too good to be drafted; but his master was never reconciled to him, and I fear that poor Romulus often got a cut from his whip in consequence of his bald face. They were chiefly bred from the Egremont blood; but as Mr. Chute often visited at Castle Ashby, not far from the Duke of Grafton's kennel, he sometimes obtained there a very useful cross of a somewhat larger type. He always considered 'Newforest Jasper' to be the chief ancestor of his pack, and the model to which he desired to bring them. Newforest Jasper was a hound of great fame in his day, and much bred from. He was bred by Lord Egremont, but obtained his name and fame as one of the pack of Mr. Gilbert, of the Newforest, a cotemporary and friend of the grandfather of the present Sir William Heathcote.* Mr. Chute had a

* There is at Hursley Park a half-length painting, by Gardiner, of this Mr. Gilbert, together with his friend Sir W. Heathcote

picture of this beautiful hound painted by Mrs. Chute, and hung up in his hounds' lodging room. He said that as great families had the portrait of some distinguished ancestor, the judge, or the general, or the statesman, in their rooms, he did not see why the dogs should not have their family pictures also. Of these hounds I think he generally had about thirty couples; and the establishment well deserved the motto which he had painted over the kennel-door, 'Multum in parvo.'

It is more difficult to describe their style of work than their form. Mr. Apperly, who wrote popular articles for the *Sporting Magazine*, between thirty and forty years ago, under the name of Nimrod, gives an account of them in one number, which, if I remember right, begins with nearly these words, 'When I lived at Beaupaire, I had a neighbour who kept a very neat little pack of foxhounds, which used to blaze away over the Hampshire Hills, whenever they could catch hold of a scent; and, small as they were, it was not a bad nag who could enjoy himself for an hour in their company.'* Over a country they were

and one of Sir William's sons, the father of the present baronet. Mr. Gilbert is holding in his hand the head of a fox just killed, to which a little terrier is jumping up. Parts of their horses appear behind, and fill up the back-ground of the picture.

* Mr. Apperly himself was apt to be much nearer to them at the beginning than at the end of the hour. He was frequently seen going very well for a short time, but he never cared to ride up to hounds throughout a run. No doubt he could have done so if he had chosen, for he was good horseman, and bold enough to encounter greater difficulties than Hampshire usually presents; but he hunted more for business than for pleasure. A little, perhaps, to sell his horse, but much more for the purpose of collecting materials for his very cleverly written articles, so that his object was to get out as often as he could with few horses.

very quick and lively, spreading wide at a check, but carrying a better head, and covering less ground when running hard than most hounds do; and this peculiarity, together with their uniformly dark colour, occasioned more difficulty in distinguishing one hound from another in a run, than in any other pack that I ever saw. They had plenty of tongue, but it was of a lighter and more treble tone than that of ordinary foxhounds. The faults chiefly to be watched against were unsteadiness, wildness, and overrunning the scent. Their peculiar merit was in cover, while their faults came out chiefly in the open. They spread very wide in drawing, yet got together with wonderful rapidity when a fox was found. I never saw hounds who could push through a strong cover so quickly. In a run, they generally came out of a large wood on better terms with their fox than when they entered it. It was not unusual for strangers, who had gone well with them over the country, to be completely thrown out by a cover like Bramdown or Waltham Trinlies: they would imagine that the wood afforded an opportunity for a pull at their horses, and consequently slacken their pace, and see no more of the run. A gentleman from a distant country, who chanced to be hunting one season with the Vine, was much struck by this quality in the pack. He said he should like to see ten couple of these hounds, ten couple of the Duke of Beaufort's, and ten couple of any other crack pack, put into a large wood to find a fox, and he was confident that a large majority of the ten couple that came out first with him would be the Vine hounds.

I had once a remarkable opportunity of testing the merits of this breed of hounds in cover. It was in

January, 1821, that I had three days' roebuck-hunting with a gentleman near Blandford, in the large woods on his own estate, and round Milton Abbey, into which the roebuck had been introduced many years before. This gentleman had originally kept harriers, and had not thought fit to alter his kind of hound when he made this important change in the game that they were to pursue. They were large powerful harriers, without any apparent cross of the foxhound; but he had received from Mr. Chute a brother and sister named Valiant and Vanity. These were very good and handsome, and in their prime, having been drafted by Mr. Chute at the end of the first season only because they were rather too small to satisfy even him. They were not higher than the average of the pack; and I was told that over the open they did not run away from them. On that point, however, I can say nothing; for we never got half a mile away from the woods in the course of the three days. But the manner in which these two foxhounds beat the whole pack of harriers in the woods was remarkable. From the moment that the game was found, their light tongues were heard at head. Whenever the scent crossed a ride, they were over it, and out of sight, before the rest had appeared. The longer the work continued, the greater became the interval between them and the others; till at last it came to be Vanity and Valiant pressing the roebuck, and the rest of the pack making much noise and little progress on the line behind them. I thought that this might have taught their owner that he was breeding the wrong sort of animal for his purpose.

I was assured, indeed, that these hounds not unfre-

quently had long runs over the Dorsetshire hills; or, still better, into the Vale of Blackmore; and that on such occasions they usually killed. I learnt also that the roebuck, when beaten, does not stand at bay, like a stag, but runs his head into some hedge or thicket, and kicks violently with his hind legs. I suppose his instinct tells him that his short horns, leaning backwards, and having no point projecting forwards, could not be brought to bear effectually on an enemy. I did not see a roebuck killed, nor much distressed; nor was it very likely that I should, as in those large woods we were continually changing, and there were only two hounds in the pack that could press their game hard.

There is little to be said about Mr. Chute's horses; they were very inferior to his hounds, both in quality and condition. He could not afford to give high prices for them, and was often content to pick up for a moderate sum any young horse which he had seen going tolerably well with a farmer. Accordingly, they were apt to be either underbred, or undersized, or in some way or other below the mark. He kept six horses for himself and his two men; a number scarcely sufficient, even if the horses had been of a higher quality; but the Vine is not a severe country for horses, and Mr. Chute did not generally make long days.

From early in May to the middle of August these horses were turned out, day and night, without corn, in the pasture between the house and the water, which was never mown. This was a good pasture, sound and cool for their feet, affording plenty of shade and water; and where they were constantly under the

master's eye; but they generally became too fat. Mr. Chute had a custom of physicking them, while out at grass, with some mild medicine which he procured from a man at Norwich. In those days clipping was unknown, nor were the advantages of hot water and flannel bandages generally appreciated. The difference between good and bad grooming was much more apparent then than it is now, and the grooming at the Vine was not first-rate. Accordingly, it was a general remark that Chute's horses were seldom fit to go till the season was half over. From this circumstance, as well as from a general deficiency of riding power in the field, it often happened that the hounds got away by themselves. I remember that in my boyish enthusiasm for Mr. Chute's hounds, and in my inexperience of other packs which were better ridden to, I used to consider this as a great honour to the hounds, and a sure proof of their superiority in speed over the H.H., who were not in the habit of beating their field in the same manner.*

And this may be as good a place as any to give a few miscellaneous particulars connected with the pack.

They generally hunted five times in a fortnight. That is to say, they took a third day in the week whenever they could. Mr. Chute never advertised,

* At that time there was no want of good riders with the H.H. Besides others well deserving to be mentioned, if that hunt were my subject, there were the Greenwoods of Brookwood House, accomplished in every kind of horsemanship, military or sporting, by land or by water; and Knight of Chawton House, whose quiet effective style of getting across a country was a model of sportsmanlike and gentlemanlike riding: always *with* hounds, and never *over* them.

and seldom fixed more than one day at a time. Even when hunting with him, you could not always learn the next day's meet till late in the day. It depended on the work done, and the number of hounds which happened to be cut by flints, whether he would hunt twice or three times in that week, and whether on the hills or in the vale. They did very little in cub-hunting, nor was that little conducted in a manner beneficial to the hounds; in the driest and hottest morning in September, Mr. Chute would leave a half-beaten cub in cover, to go after an old fox over a country quite unfit for riding. Often, when regular hunting began in the last week of October, they had not killed more than two brace of foxes. No doubt his hounds would have been steadier and better if his entry had been allowed to kill a reasonable number of cubs, and had not been taken staring over an open country before they had learned to trust to their noses in cover. Mr. Chute's country was amply sufficient for his number of hunting days, and was well stocked with old foxes. A blank was rare, and most of the foxes that he killed were after good runs, and were well deserved by hounds. I think he usually killed from fifteen to eighteen brace in a season, and the hounds were not often long out of blood. Halfcrowns were collected for the men whenever a fox was killed after a fair run. The men wore round hats, and long scarlet coats, which could lap over and defend their knees against wet or cold. The huntsman carried a small twisted bugle, slung over his shoulder by a strap—a more melodious instrument, but less convenient, than the straight horn usually carried at the saddle-bow. It is not heard so far off, is less easily handled when

galloping, and might cause injury if a man were to fall with it under him. I believe Mr. Chute generally carried such a one in his coat-pocket, and I know that one was always to be seen lying about in the gunroom at the Vine; but he seldom used it, and was not very successful in his attempts to blow it.





LETTER V.

THE MEN.

AFTER the hounds and horses, I must attempt some description of the men—servants, gentlemen, and others—whom I found in Mr. Chute's field when first I began to observe them. I reserve the master for a Letter to himself; and therefore first in importance comes the huntsman. George Hickson had been so long known, as whipper-in, by the name of 'George,' that when he became huntsman he never attained to the dignity of a surname, but was still called 'George.' He was a light, neatly-made man, with a handsome countenance, and a most melodious voice. He possessed also, in a high degree, two very useful qualifications for his office: a long sight, which could discern objects at a great distance; and, what was more important, an accuracy of ear which enabled him to distinguish the tongue of almost every hound in his pack. Yet, with these natural advantages, he was far from being a very good huntsman, at least after the fox was found; for up to that point, I do not know that I ever saw a better. He brought out his hounds in faultless condition, and drew a cover remarkably well: not

according to the new system, in which the huntsman walks almost silently through the cover, with every hound in sight, covering only the small space between him and the whippers-in, on each side of him; but according to the old system of leaving hounds to find the fox by themselves, trusting them to draw wide,* allowing them plenty of time for the operation, and frequently speaking to them loudly and cheerily, that they may always know where their huntsman is, and have no fear of being left behind. George's accuracy of ear secured him from ever being mistaken in encouraging a hound, though his pack in general was far from being steady from riot. To see these hounds spread themselves into all the angles and recesses of Great Dean, or of Sandford wood, find their fox in some remote corner, and get together like a flock of starlings, was as satisfactory a thing, in its way,

* Mr. Codrington, who hunted the Old Berkshire country about the year 1820, carried this style of drawing a wood to an extreme. People were surprised to see how long he would remain in one spot, in the middle of a strong cover, while his hounds were spreading far and wide round him. He trained his horses to stand perfectly still, so that he might be sure to hear any distant challenge; but he had acquired a ludicrous habit of continuing this training after it had ceased to be required, and was often to be heard expostulating with his horse in this manner: 'Whoo! stand still, you brute; be quiet, can't you?'—when the animal had not moved a muscle. Mr. Codrington hunted his hounds himself; and though too heavy to ride well up to them, was esteemed a first-rate judge of hunting. His pack was by far the most unsizeable I ever saw, containing specimens of almost the largest and the smallest possible foxhounds. So long as they ran and worked well together, about which he was very particular, he did not object to this disparity of size; but perhaps rather prided himself on being able to get animals so dissimilar in appearance to pack perfectly well together.

as a sportsman could witness. But as soon as they began to run across a country, little dependance could be placed on George: not so much, I think, from any deficiency in clearness of head, or in knowledge of the habits of the fox, as from the fatal fact that, when hounds ran hard, he was seldom with them. On the hills, this might have been chiefly the fault of his horses; in the vale, it was caused by his wretched style of riding, getting off and leading his horse over the most ordinary fences. Now, a huntsman who is not habitually with his hounds cannot hope to keep them long on good terms with their fox. Whatever other good qualities he may possess must be neutralised by this one defect. Such a man may, perhaps, occasionally recover a lost fox by a wide cast, and may show talent and judgment in so doing; but though he may thus *get them out of difficulties*, he cannot perform the more important office of keeping them *from getting into difficulties*: he cannot give them immediate assistance at the moment when it could be most easily rendered, and would be most effectual. Moreover, if neither master nor huntsman is sufficiently forward to keep the field in order, further mischief is sure to ensue. Ignorant or over-eager horsemen press on, and carry the hounds beyond the point where the scent had failed; the huntsman comes up in total ignorance how far the hounds had made it good, which way they were leaning, how far they had probably been overridden; whether there had been anything ahead likely to turn the fox; ignorant, in short, of every circumstance which might have directed him in making his cast. From such causes it often happened that the

first check which Mr. Chute's hounds came to lost the fox.

George, however, retained his place, except for a very brief interval, during his kind master's life. Once, indeed, Mr. Chute was persuaded to supersede him; and to procure a huntsman named Cane from some distant county, I think Norfolk. I do not believe that he was a man of much ability, but it must be confessed that he was scarcely allowed a fair trial in a strange country. Mr. Chute had deposed George most reluctantly, and was very glad in his heart when the new man did not seem to succeed. About Christmas, when, according to the laudable custom which now seems to be obsolete, a hard frost set in, Cane asked leave to go home and see his friends. Mr. Chute told him that he was most welcome to *go*, but that he need not take the trouble to *come back* again. The man was discharged, and when the frost broke, George came out again at the head of the hounds; and Tom Chute observed, 'My brother was delighted to find himself "*cum canibus, sine Cane*."'

It was Mr. Chute's foible that he permitted his servants to use familiar and disrespectful language towards him, and I cannot acquit George of great blame for taking an undue advantage of this indulgence. The two instances which I will record may seem to some scarcely credible; but I assure you that on both occasions I was close by, and heard the words myself.

Mr. Chute had bought a horse called Whiskey, and mounted George on him for one season. This horse proved to be a capital hunter, by far the best that I remember in his stables. The next season Mr. Chute,

to George's great disgust, took Whiskey for his own riding. Early in that season we had a very good ring from Nutley, by Somerdown, through Manydown and Tangier Parks, and round by Long Coppice and North Oakley back to Nutley. The first part was slow, from the going off of a white frost, but in Tangier Park hounds suddenly began to run hard, and slipped away from most of the field, including Mr. Chute on Whiskey. George and I, with two or three others, chanced to be well with them. On approaching Nutley we came to a large fallow, where the hounds, though not actually brought to a check, had to feel their way across it, feathering on a weak scent which they could scarcely speak to. George was giving them his whole attention, as at such a critical moment he ought to do, when up came Mr. Chute in the parallel furrow by George's side, and began vexing him with questions. 'George, where have you been? What hounds have been at head? Which of them have been doing it? George, why don't you answer me?' George, still intent on his hounds, vouchsafed neither look nor word. At last, as the master reiterated his questions, the servant turned round to him and said, 'You have gone and taken away my best horse from me: why don't you ride up and look for yourself, if you want to know what hounds are about?'

On another occasion we were drawing Blackwood, a cover very full of riot, neutral between Mr. Chute and the H. H. As Mr. Villebois himself and several other members of that hunt were out with us, it was desirable that everything should go well: but alas! in a short time more puppies were running hare in various directions than any one whipper-in could pos-

sibly cope with. Amidst all this disturbance, however, George's fine ear could distinguish Larkspur, throwing his tongue from time to time on the drag of a fox : to this he was giving his full attention, cheering the old hound, and trying to get the others up to him : but his master persisted in riding close to him, and pestering him with ill-timed questions—'George, is that right? What hound is that? Will it do, George?'—till the man, not unreasonably provoked, retorted, 'How can I tell unless I listen? and how am I to listen if you keep chattering so? Do be quiet for a minute. You make a worse noise to-day than ever you did.'

I may add that these words were also heard by Mr. Villebois, who told me afterwards the following circumstance connected with them. Mr. Chute had begun that season with remarkable success, having killed many foxes with short quick runs. A gentleman, a great champion of the hunt, who had a habit of speaking of the pack almost as if it was his own, had boasted of this to Mr. Villebois, saying, 'You really ought to come and look at *us*: *we* are got to such a pitch of perfection that *we cannot lose a fox*.' 'Well,' said Villebois, with his peculiar look, when relating this to me, 'this made me open my eyes, for I had hunted in Hampshire for twenty years, and I had always found it easy enough to lose a fox : so I went to Blackwood to have a look at these invincibles ; and you well remember that what we learned there was only what we knew before—our good old friend's easy temper, and the way in which his servants take advantage of it.' I cannot help adding, however, in justice to the gentleman who had boasted of the pack,

that, though nothing was done with the Blackwood fox, yet that same day ended with a fast forty minutes, and a kill in the open.

The only whipper-in of whom I have anything to record was a good-humoured broad-shouldered fellow known to us only by the nickname of Pop, which he had inherited from his father, a veteran post-boy at Overton. Pop had been huntsman to a powerful pack of harriers kept by Mr. Twinam at Whitchurch, which used to go very fast over the open country between that town and Winchester Race-course. Pop, however, occupied a higher position after leaving the Vine, for he became huntsman to Mr. Charles Craven, of Brighton, who was master of the foxhounds then called the East Sussex, but now the Southdown; the title of East Sussex being transferred to another pack occupying a country between Eastbourne and Hastings. Mr. Craven was an excellent sportsman, and a patient and considerate master, and under his guidance Pop became a very fair huntsman. When he rose to this dignity, his nickname dropped from him, and he became known by his proper appellation of George Hennessey. Being inland bred, he never could clearly comprehend the law of tides. On one occasion, when the day's sport had ended under the Newhaven cliffs, George proposed to go home along the beach, by a track passable only at low water. Lord Gage—who knew most things, whether by land or sea, in that country—expressed some doubt as to the state of the tide. 'Well, my Lord,' replied George, 'I fancy the tide generally *is* out about this time of day.'

And now I must try to recall the principal persons

who constituted Mr. Chute's field when I first hunted. I say nothing of the various alterations which were continually taking place afterwards. The habitual red-coats are soon enumerated. First I must place the two Mr. Portals: for they and Sir Peter Pole's family, having large landed property, and being very friendly to hunting in general, and to Mr. Chute in particular, were his most influential supporters. Indeed I have been told that at a time when Mr. Chute's income was known to be scarcely equal to his expenses, they, and a few other friends, wished to subscribe towards the maintenance of an establishment from which they obtained so much amusement, but the friendly offer was declined. And of the two brothers I must place

1st. The younger, Mr. John Portal, of Freefolk House, for he was by far the most regular attendant of the two, and knew and cared the most about hunting. He was himself, at different times, master of excellent packs of harriers. He, on his beautiful thorough-bred bay horse Sultan,* could go any pace, and last any time, and had a singular power of keeping close to hounds without taking many fences. He seldom came into the vale, from which his residence was distant.

2nd. The elder brother, Mr. William Portal, of Laverstoke House; sitting very erect on his horse, and

* Sultan was once sold for a very high price to a gentleman near Windsor, but proved useless to him, because, though he possessed eminently the speedy and lasting qualities of a racer, together with the hunter's power of going through heavy ground, yet he was deficient in one accomplishment which is generally thought essential to a hunter: he could not be made to fence. I believe that he eventually returned to the Freefolk stables.

generally attended by a groom; not equal to his brother as a sportsman, but liking the sport, and very ready to ride over fences.

3rd. Mr. Apletree, of Goldings, near Basingstoke; not very fast, nor very forward.

4th. Mr. Edward Golding, of Maiden Earley, near Reading; then lately married, and living at Quidhampton. He, with his gray Arabian, presented a very neat specimen of a light weight and his hunter: he went admirably, but did not remain long to adorn our field.

5th. Mr. Sclater, of Hoddington House; then a young man, living with his aunt at Tangier Park.

6th. Mr. Abraham Pole, who was often staying with his family at Wolverton Park, but did not reside in this country.

7th. Mr. Wither, of Manydown*, father of the present Mr. Lovelace Wither, of Tangier, hunted frequently.

Then comes a list of black-coats, including some of the best sportsmen in the field:—

1st., and far first, I must put Mr. Henry Pole, of Wolverton, now living at Waltham Place, near Maidenhead. He had at one time managed a pack of harriers

* I well remember this Mr. Wither's father, Mr. Bigg Wither, grandfather to the present Sir Wm. Heathcote, from whom I received kindness when a child. I do not believe that he had ever been a sportsman, but he was held in high respect throughout the country, for his strong sense and high principles. It is said that on one occasion, at some county meeting, when Mr. Bigg Wither, and a magistrate remarkable for the loudness of his voice, had been in the minority, another gentleman who had also been on the losing side observed, 'Well, though we were outvoted, yet we may have the comfort of thinking that both the *voice* and the *sense* of the meeting were really with us.'

for his father, Sir Peter Pole; and I have been told that they were very perfect, both in themselves, and in the manner in which they were handled. He was an excellent sportsman, and, what was more rare with us, was really a good rider across a country. I have often seen him go away from us all, on his beautiful little bay horse Bonaparte, who always carried his long neck and small head very high, like a giraffe, and went as if he enjoyed fast pace and heavy ground.

2nd. Mr. Edward St. John, of Ashe Park, brother to the master of hounds at Finchampstead. He had a full share of the family taste for hunting. He rode very quietly: always knowing what hounds were about; and when to turn, and when to make play: without looking to anyone else, or showing the least jealousy of others being before him.

3rd. Mr. John Orde, of Winslade; on a brown horse, who had a strange trick of carrying his tongue protruding out of his mouth, just above the bit, where it soon got covered with dirt. Mr. Orde was a sportsman, and went in a fair place both on the hills and in the vale.

4th. The old Rector of Baughurst, a gentleman of the most wooden and inexpressive countenance imaginable. He seldom spoke, unless spoken to; and was rarely seen within a field or two of hounds: but he loved hunting in his own way, and went quite as well in the vale as on the hills.

5th. I must not omit our master's brother, Mr. Thomas Chute; for though he was with us only half the season, yet he was an important member of the hunt. He resided on the family property in Norfolk,

but, about Christmas, used to bring his horses to the Vine, for the remainder of the season. He was a better sportsman, and a far bolder rider, than his brother. His horses were well bred, and good in themselves, but had generally the fault of being not quite up to his weight.

Then follow some neither red nor black. Mr Deersley, father-in-law to Mr. St. John, and living with him, hunted a good deal. He was a fine old man, and a bold rider for his age; he was always well mounted, and perhaps a little too much inclined to be diffuse on the merits and value of his horse. I remember, one day when a young man was looking doubtfully at a low drop leap, Mr. Deersley rode over it, saying, 'Come along, Sir, you will be ashamed not to follow an old man of seventy.'

Mr. William Wickham, of Bullington, with two neat little horses, a bay and a gray, used to hunt with us whenever the hounds came on his side of the country. His brother James more rarely.

My old friend Charles Harwood, of Dean, came out as often as he could, on a well shaped but not perfectly sound old horse, called 'The Kicker,'* which had been given to him by Mr. Chute. Charles farmed the

* 'The Kicker' was so-called on account of the consequences which followed every attempt to touch him on the rump. George made a curious use of this peculiarity. Mr. Chute's huntsman and whipper-in used to clear the course at the Basingstoke Races, in their scarlet coats, where they cut as conspicuous a figure proportionately, at this little meeting, as Mr. Davis and his attendants, in their royal liveries, do at Ascot. When George, mounted on The Kicker, found the mob inclined to close in again too soon after he had passed along the ropes, he just touched The Kicker on the rump, who immediately justified his name, and compelled the crowd to keep their distance.

family property; but he loved hunting better than farming, and, I suspect, knew much more about it. He certainly was no exception to the low standard of riding which prevailed in that field; and the present hard-riding generation would scarcely believe at how small a fence he would dismount; but he really knew a great deal about hunting, by hereditary instinct I suppose, and would have been an excellent sportsman if he had enjoyed a wider field of observation; but he had scarcely seen any other pack, except occasionally the H.H., which he thought it his duty to undervalue, out of loyalty to Mr. Chute; and so he rested in an undisturbed conviction that 'Chute's hounds were the very best that ever had been, and that ever would be.'

Alas! while I write these letters, I learn that the Dean property is sold, and that the name of Harwood is no longer to be found amongst the landed gentry of Hants. As an old Hampshire man, I must be permitted to regret this loss. The Harwoods were an old family, with some racy peculiarities of character. They had supplied the county with a sheriff in the days of Queen Anne. I believe that I was acquainted with the sixth and the seventh John Harwood, who had held the estate in uninterrupted succession. On the death of the last John, who was a clergyman and an excellent man, his brother Charles succeeded to the property, and was the last male who possessed it. It has been supposed that Fielding took the idea of his Squire Western from the John Harwood of his day; and as Fielding used to visit at Oakley Hall, it is not improbable that some features of his immortal Tory Squire might have been copied from this original.

The town of Basingstoke supplied several foxhunters. Mr. Warne the lawyer, more than one member of the May family, and now and then, for a short time, between one patient and another, Mr. Charles Lyford the surgeon,* enjoying it exceedingly. Two generations of the Curtis family, who kept the Angel Inn and farmed largely, were regular attendants; with a large number of Tubbs and other farmers, all keen sportsmen, and some of them good ones.

But the most remarkable person of this class, or rather of a class peculiar to himself, was old Wyse, a civil, respectful mannered, elderly man, exceedingly fond of hunting, who drove Rogers' coach every day, Sundays excepted, from Southampton to Popham Lane in the morning, and back to Southampton in the afternoon. He arrived at the Flower Pots, Popham Lane, soon after ten o'clock, and left it between three and four. Either the H.H. or Mr. Chute was sure to be within a few miles of this central place, two or three days in the week. Thus he was able to see the whole or part of many runs. He always had a rea-

* Charles Lyford really knew something about hunting. Not so his father, the old doctor. I remember him a fine, tall, old man, with such a flaxen wig as is not to be seen or conceived by this generation. This wig he used to '*dispart with biennially*,' (as Sir Walter Scott expresses it), and to bestow the reversion of it, every second year, on an old man in our parish, as tall and fine looking as himself, producing thereby a ludicrous resemblance between the peasant and the doctor. It is recorded of him that, having accidentally fallen in with the hounds when checked, he caused great confusion by galloping up in a very excited state, waving his hat, and exclaiming, 'Tally-ho! Mr. Chute. Tally-ho! Mr. Chute.' Not that he had seen the fox, but because he imagined that '*Tally-ho!*' was the word with which foxhunters ordinarily greeted each other in the field.

sonably good horse standing at the Flower Pots. Sometimes he sold one to a gentleman of either hunt, who all knew and noticed him. The first time I was allowed to go out hunting without my father, I was placed especially under his care; and as he used also to drive me to and from Winchester School several times in the year, I came to look upon him as an old friend.

There were, of course, others whom I have forgotten; but these, I think, were the chief notables in the field at the time of which I am writing. The ordinary number might have been from twenty to thirty horsemen, though on some occasions there were many more.

If I had written a generation or two earlier, I might probably have had to record that a general improvement in the manners and language of sportsmen had taken place within my recollection. Beckford indeed claims this improvement for his own times. He observes, in his fourteenth letter, that 'the intemperance, clownishness, and ignorance of the old foxhunter are quite worn out;' and that 'foxhunting is now become the amusement of gentlemen, nor need any gentleman be ashamed of it.' How far this was generally true of the sportsmen of his day, I do not pretend to say. Mr. Beckford himself was undoubtedly an instance of a foxhunter of cultivated mind, literary taste, and no inconsiderable talent; but this I can positively assert, that, in my youth, the manners and language of the hunting field were as refined and gentlemanlike as in the dining and drawing rooms of the neighbourhood. One great change, however, has taken place, within my recollection, in the society of

the hunting field, from the almost total withdrawal of the clergy from it. In Mr. Chute's field they chanced to form almost a majority of the gentlemen who regularly hunted with him, because there happened to be several unbeneficed clergymen, of private fortune, residing in the country, who were fond of hunting. But in those days, any country clergyman was expected to hunt, if he liked it, just as much as he was expected to dine out with his neighbours ; nor was he supposed to derogate from his character, or to impair his influence with his parishioners, by the one indulgence more than by the other. The withdrawal of the clergy from the hunting field in these days has doubtless been accompanied with a general elevation of their character, and with a greater devotion to their peculiar duties ; but to the society in the hunting field the loss of this class of men may perhaps have rather a lowering tendency.





LETTER VI.

WILLIAM JOHN CHUTE, ESQ., OF THE VINE, M.P.

IT is with much diffidence that I attempt a description of the person and character of Mr. Chute himself. Familiar as I was with him from my earliest childhood, I have myself a distinct image of him before my eyes; but I can present to others only a faint and vague reflection of that image; and indeed few now remain, after a lapse of forty years, who could judge of the likeness, or take any interest in the picture. It might be easy to hit off some of the broader features of his character; but it contained also some more delicate traits, without which the sketch would be a mere caricature; and how am I to describe the singular mixture of shrewdness and weakness, original humour, high animal spirits, and perfect temper, all combined with the manners and good taste of a true gentleman, which made Mr. Chute exactly what he was, and entirely unlike any other person?

Mr. Chute had a fair, round face, with a most agreeable countenance, expressive of good humour and intelligence. He was rather short, but remarkably well-made, with full, well-rounded limbs, indicating

both strength and activity. I wish I could make others see him, as I can fancy that I see him myself, trotting up to the meet at Freefolk Wood, or St. John's, sitting rather loose on his horse, and his clothes rather loose upon him—the scarlet coat flapping open, a little whitened at the collar by the contact of his hair powder and the friction of his pig-tail; the frill of his shirt above, and his gold watchchain and seal below, both rather prominent, the short knee-breeches scarcely meeting the boot-tops. See! he rides up; probably with some original amusing remark, at any rate with a cheerful greeting to his friends, a nod and kindly word to the farmers, and some laughing notice of the schoolboy on his pony.

Or I could give quite a different picture of him in his parish church—standing upright, tilting his heavy folio prayer-book on the edge of his high pew, so that he had to look *up* rather than *down* on it. There he stands, like Sir Roger de Coverley, giving out the responses in an audible tone, with an occasional glance to see what tenants were at church, and what school children were misbehaving; and I am sorry to add, sometimes, especially when the rustic psalmody began its discord in the gallery, with a humour which even church could not restrain, making some significant gesture to provoke a smile from me and other young persons in the pew.

Mr. Chute was educated at Harrow, where Mr. Spencer Perceval, afterwards the murdered prime minister, was his fag; and the elder brother, Lord Arden, his cotemporary and friend. I believe that he always kept up as much intimacy with the Perceval family as their different courses through life per-

mitted ; and his old schoolfellow's son, Mr. Arthur Perceval, was the clergyman who ministered to him in his last illness. From Harrow he went to Clare Hall at Cambridge, and afterwards spent some time at Angers in France. The consequence was that he could speak French with a very good accent, and was fond of burlesquing the shrugs and grimaces of the old-fashioned French mode of salutation.

Mr. Chute succeeded to the family property on the death of his father in 1790 ; and in the same year was returned on the Tory interest for the county of Hants, together with Sir William Heathcote, the grandfather of the present baronet ; but this success was sullied by a great affliction to Mr. Chute in the death of his beloved brother Chaloner, who was carried off by a fever contracted by his exertions in canvassing. His opponents had been Lord John Russell, father of the late Duke of Bedford and of the present Earl Russell, and Mr. Clarke Jervoise of Idsworth House, and the contest had been a severe one. Mr. Chute lost his seat for a few months in 1806, when the death of Pitt gave occasion for the short-lived administration of Fox and Grenville, known at the time by the title of 'All the Talents.' On this occasion Sir William Heathcote retired, and Mr. Chute fought the Tory battle in conjunction with Sir Henry Mildmay of Dogmersfield Park ; but in those war-times the Portsmouth Dockyards supplied so many voters who were nominees of the existing administration, that they could generally turn the balance between the Whig and Tory constituencies of the county ; and accordingly Mr. Chute and his colleague were beaten by Mr. Herbert, the great

uncle of the present Earl of Carnarvon, and Mr. Thistlethwaite of Southwick Park, after a very sharp contest, which is the first political event that I can recollect. As soon as the Duke of Portland became minister, shortly after the death of Fox, the two Tory candidates were returned without difficulty. In 1808, Sir Henry Mildmay died, and his place, as county member, was occupied by Mr. (afterwards Sir Thomas) Heathcote. He and Mr. Chute retained their seats without any serious opposition till the year 1820, when both, though still unopposed, voluntarily resigned, and were succeeded by Mr. Fleming of Stoneham Park, a Tory, and Mr. Jervoise of Herriard House, a Whig.

In 1793, Mr. Chute married Elizabeth, daughter of Joshua Smith, Esq., of Earle Stoke, Wilts, and member for Devizes; a woman of rare excellence, whose memory I cherish with so much respect and gratitude that I am unwilling to connect it more than is necessary with the subjects of these light memoirs. Of her I will only record that, while her secret good deeds were countless, the only one displayed to the world was the spire which she added to the parish church of Sherborne St. John. Mr. Chute's health and strength seemed to remain unimpaired to the end of the hunting season in the spring of 1824; but very soon afterwards appeared the first symptoms of the malady which terminated his life, at the house of a near relation in Portland Place, London, on December 13, 1824, in the 68th year of his age.

Mr. Chute's pursuits were very far from literary; but he showed natural good taste, both in music and in his appreciation of the merits of any book that he

might have been induced to read. I have been told that he wrote the following graceful and appropriate epitaph on his sister, Miss Chute, still to be seen, I suppose, in the churchyard of Oakley, in which village she had spent the latter years of her life : —

With all who did her bounties know or share
A decent sorrow ever will remain :
A grateful village owns her fostering care ;
A grateful village mourns her loss in vain.

I know that, to the very last, he would occasionally send me Latin verses, of which perhaps neither the grammar nor the prosody would be quite defensible, on any sporting event which had taken hold of his fancy—the last lingering relics of his Harrow school-days ! ‘ *Servabit odorem Testa diu.*’

Under his light and joyous manners, Mr. Chute concealed much sensibility of feeling, and strong family affections. His attachment to his surviving brother was great ; and he could never speak of his deceased brother Chaloner without emotion ; but such feelings were seldom displayed by him, grave and painful thoughts were alien from his disposition. He loved rather to extract amusement for himself and for others out of the daily occurrences of life, and to diffuse cheerfulness around him. His influence on the home circle was well expressed to me, almost in the words of the old song, by one who had lived with him from childhood—‘ the very sound of his step upon ‘ the stairs was like music in the house.’

He was exceedingly temperate in his habits. Few men, who take such strong exercise, eat or drink so sparingly as he did. A few slices of thin bread and

butter, and sometimes a small sausage roll, with a cup of green tea, was the breakfast on which he usually set forth on his long day's work, but the little which he took must be of the very best quality. He had more than a woman's delicacy of taste, and was even fanciful in his eating and drinking. He would send away his plate in disgust, if he was told that the rabbit which he was eating was a homebred and not a wild one. He disliked the idea of bread and butter spread by a man: the rule at the Vine was that this operation should be performed by one of the maid servants. His few glasses of wine must be of the best old port. For claret he had a great contempt, and I have heard him declare that his butler, old Bush, could make as good stuff as *that* out of the washings of his port wine glasses.

I must try to give some idea of Mr. Chute's peculiar vein of humour, his readiness in repartee, and his oddities; and I know no other way of doing this than by giving a few instances. Each one perhaps singly may seem to be trivial, and scarce worth recording; but it is only by many minute touches that a likeness can be produced, either by the pen or the pencil.

Sir John Cope, who professed Radical politics, once wrote to Mr. Chute, that he had a litter of five dogs in that year's entry, whose names all had *pretty much the same meaning*, for they were Placeman, Parson, Pensioner, Pilferer, and Plunderer. But the Tory Squire, with ready invention, retorted that he would show him a litter of which the five names were *equally synonymous*, being Radical, Rebel, Regicide, Ruffian, and Rascal.

In a long run from St. John's to Chawton Park, Mr. Chute got into trouble at the fence out of Bradley Wood. He slipped as he was leading his horse, and the animal trod heavily on his thigh. We who were near were in great alarm, but he got up with no other injury than a bruise. Mr. John Portal expressed his delight that it was no worse, saying, 'Egad, I thought we were going to lose our *member*.' 'Did you?' replied Mr. Chute, rubbing the injured part. 'Well, I can tell you *I* thought I was going to lose *mine*.'

One day, paying his coal bill in Basingstoke, he complained of the high price charged. 'Well, sir,' replied the coal merchant rather pertly, 'you must remember that coals *is* coals, in these times.' 'Indeed,' rejoined Mr. Chute, 'I am glad to hear you say so: for what you have sent me lately have been mostly *slates*.'

But his peculiarities perhaps came out more in his oddities than in his wit. He was very fond of sending notes and messages by any chance conveyance, rather than by a servant or the post. It often happened that such communications miscarried, so that the earth which he had intended to have stopped remained open, to the injury of the next day's sport. When I was living near Newbury, he wanted, one day, to let me know where his hounds were to meet; so falling in with a beggar, who professed to be going towards Newbury, he gave him some money, and a note to be delivered to me. Of course the man found out my residence, in hopes of receiving a second donation; of course too the note came too late to be of any use, and cost more both to Mr. Chute and to me than the postage, even in those ante-Rowland Hill days, would have amounted to.

Mr. Chute had a whimsical objection to seeing a horse lying down in the stable in the daytime. If he found the horses which had been hunted the day before in this comfortable and salutary posture, he would stir them up with his stick, saying that it was not respectful in a horse to lie down before his master; and that it looked as if they were tired, which was just what they were, and what they had a right to be. I can say nothing in favour either of the good sense or the humanity of this strange fancy.

But some of his most characteristic oddities came out in his manner of quizzing his old bailiff, Coxe, who managed the home farm, in the success of which his own interests were concerned. Mr. Chute took an actual pleasure in this man's failures, and was most especially delighted whenever the hay intended for farm purposes was injured, after he had secured all that he required for his hunters in good condition. I once expressed to him my concern at having seen some of his hay long out in the rain. 'My hay!' said he, 'what do you mean? I've no hay out. I got up all mine famously last week.' I mentioned the field of his in which I had observed it. 'O, pooh!' said he, 'that was not *my* hay, that was Coxe's! Silly fellow! it serves him right, and I am glad of it; he might have got it all up a week ago, if he had had any sense.'

But though Mr. Chute was thus bright and amusing, yet it cannot be said that he succeeded eminently in any of his main objects of pursuit in life. It always seemed to me to be the fault of his mind that he fixed his attention on little, instead of on great matters, and often mistook *exceptions* for *rules*. He was acute in observing minute points, in which he thought he

could improve on the common practice, while he disregarded the great principles by which success is to be attained. Thus, he was devoted to hunting, but he was neither a good rider,* nor, as I have before intimated, a good sportsman. He was regardless of some of the fundamental rules of foxhunting; he interfered too much, and often injudiciously with his huntsman; he had a kind of boyish eagerness for the immediate pleasure of a scurry across the country, without any consideration for the good of his hounds. But, in spite of all this, his popularity with his field was unbounded; and I have heard it said, 'After all, one would rather have middling sport with Chute, than better with any one else.'

Perhaps it would not be fair to reckon success in public life amongst the objects of his pursuit, and to pass judgment on him for failing to attain distinction in it; for though he held for thirty years the high position of representative of the undivided county of Hants, yet he was brought into this situation by circumstances without much desire on his part, and he never really put forth his energies in that direction; but it must be confessed that, excepting his great popularity, he manifested none of the qualities which would now be thought requisite for such an office. He was not a good man of business, and paid little attention to it.

* Beckford would have admired Mr. Chute's style of riding; for he says, in his seventeenth letter, that 'the *best way of riding*' is to 'dismount at once when you come to a leap which you do not like to take, for in looking about for easier places much time is lost.' Mr. Chute was *very decided* in dismounting at once, and was quick and active in the whole operation; so that though never well with hounds through a fast thing, he was seldom actually thrown out.

he was a very poor speaker in public, and could not even express with fluency the common-places which many men, very inferior to him in intelligence, acquire the habit of uttering with ease. But he served his generation ; he was a steady supporter of Government under Pitt, Portland, Perceval, and Liverpool : ministers could always reckon on his vote, and his constituents were satisfied with him.

But his most remarkable and most important failure was in the management of his own estate. He was always in want of money ; for he kept foxhounds, represented the county, and maintained a very large old house, and a prominent position in the neighbourhood, on an income which many would have thought scarcely sufficient for any one of these demands on it ; and no doubt all these services might have been better performed, if his means had been more ample. On the other hand, his estate was singularly capable of improvement. Its clay soil and small enclosures were overrun with oak timber ; it required clearing like an American forest, and draining like an Irish bog. In those days oak timber was of great value ; and he might have cut many thousand pounds' worth of it, and have increased the annual rents of his estate by doing so. But he never could bring himself to make any change. Conservative as he was in his politics (though the word was not then invented), he was still more conservative in his tastes and feelings. By him no hedgerow was grubbed, no sunshine let in upon his woodland fields, no land drained, no roads improved. His delight was to keep everything exactly as he had found it, and he loved to take his visitors to a stately grove

of oaks near his kennel, and tell them that it was his 'picture gallery.'

But though Mr. Chute might be defective in these points, yet was he eminently successful, and that without effort or design on his part, in winning the affection of all who knew him. It was not what he *did*, but what he *was*, which secured this success to him. He was the very personification of cheerfulness and friendliness. No one ever saw him out of temper, out of patience, or out of spirits. No one ever heard him utter an *ill-natured remark*, or a *coarse expression*. If there was little in his talents or his tone of mind to command admiration, yet was there much to attach, and nothing to be afraid of. Accordingly he was regarded with an affection which grew in proportion as he was longer or better known. The servant who took undue liberties with him when alive, was miserable at his death; and the agony of grief shown by his brother at his funeral was the most terrible thing of the kind that I ever witnessed; and recalled to my mind Scott's observation in *Marmion*, how fearful a thing it is,

When
We see the tears of bearded men.

NOTE.

The Vyne (or Vine, for it has been spelt each way at different times) appears to have been the habitation of man before the commencement of English history. Its vicinity to Silchester, and its position near the great road leading from that station to Winchester, could scarcely fail to bring it early under the notice of the Romans; and accordingly tradition says that it was one of the places where they attempted to introduce the culture of the Vine under the sunless skies of

Britain in the reign of the Emperor Probus. The plant itself probably deteriorated, but the name took firm root, and has flourished through nearly sixteen centuries. The spade and pickaxe continually discover the foundations of buildings in various directions, and probably of many different dates; but history knows nothing of the place before the reign of Henry VIII., when the present house was built by Lord Sandys, whose family had for some time previously possessed the property, and occupied a smaller mansion on nearly the same site. In spite of many changes effected in the edifice in the course of the innovating eighteenth century, unmistakable marks of the Tudor style are still to be found in the chapel and some other parts of the house. The fine stained glass in the chapel is said to have been plundered from a religious house in France, when Lord Sandys accompanied Henry VIII. at the siege and capture of Boulogne in 1544. When Queen Elizabeth, late in her reign, visited the Marquis of Winchester at Basing House, the French Ambassador and his suite were received at the Vine, for the convenience of being near her Majesty.

In 1654 the estate was purchased by Chaloner Chute, a lawyer of eminence and of moderate politics, who was retained in some of the state trials of those troubled times, and at last died occupying the high office of Speaker of the House of Commons in Richard Cromwell's brief parliament. There is in the chapel a monument representing him in his speaker's robes, recumbent on a high altar tomb, admirably executed by a sculptor named Banks, who went afterwards to Russia. This monument was erected in 1776 by Mr. John Chute, the friend and correspondent of Horace Walpole, who also made many alterations and designed many others, in more questionable taste, both inside and outside the house.

Since the year 1654, this estate has never been sold, but transmitted, either by inheritance from father to son, or by bequest to more distant relations, who have always borne the name of Chute.



LETTER VII.

THE VINE HUNT, 1824—1834.

DURING the remainder of the season, after Mr. Chute's death, the hounds went out occasionally, with only a groom acting as whipper-in, and very few of Mr. Chute's friends had any heart or inclination to go out with them. The pack had become the property of his brother, the Rev. Thomas Vere Chute; and he told me that, if he had been a layman, he would certainly have continued them himself. As it was, it became a matter of some anxiety to settle into whose care they were to be confided. Undoubtedly, '*the first choice*,' as they say at Eton, was Mr. John Portal. His property in the hunt, his long experience as a sportsman, his old and intimate friendship with the late master, all combined to point him out as his most appropriate successor. I do not know whether Mr. Chute had, during his illness, expressed any such wish to his brother, though I think it not improbable that he did so; but it is certain that Mr. Thomas Chute offered to give the pack to Mr. Portal. That gentleman, however, declined to accept the onerous gift, and it was still necessary to look out for a master.

A very fit one was found in Mr. Abraham Pole, brother to Sir Peter Pole of Wolverton Park. The following extract from a letter addressed to me by Mr. T. Chute, dated March 13th, 1825, will show the conditions which he annexed to the gift. 'The hounds are gone to the care of Mr. Abraham Pole, for whom was raised a sum of 800*l.* by twelve of the gentlemen present at the meeting at Overton, some giving 100*l.*, some 50*l.*, some 25*l.*; and, as they complimented me as considering me present, I gave them 100*l.* also, and I believe the required sum was immediately obtained. I have parted with the pack on certain conditions. That if the country is not hunted to the satisfaction of the gentlemen of the country, or when the gentleman who takes the hounds wishes to decline the management, they are to be returned to me again, consisting of the same number of effective hounds as when received, and also of the same number of un-entered ones; the same breed and sort to be continued; as it was the wish and desire of my poor brother, the last time we talked about them, being well convinced, from long experience, that none could be better calculated for the country which they hunted; so that we still have ensured a continuance and preservation of the old sort, I hope, for many years.'

Mr. Abraham Pole purchased West Ham, added largely to the house, and built stables, which still remain, together with kennels and a huntsman's residence, which stood only a short time. He was a good sportsman, and the establishment with which he commenced was a very effective one, with horses of a class superior to those which Mr. Chute had possessed. Circumstances induced him to give up the hounds at

the close of his first season, but not before he had conferred permanent benefits on the hunt, by the introduction of some valuable blood from the Duke of Beaufort's kennel, and, still more, by having brought Adamson into the country as huntsman. In the spring of 1826, the hounds were made over to the gentlemen of the country; but as no one of them chose to undertake the management, Mr. Beaver, a gentleman not much connected with the neighbourhood, was appointed to act as master: but this arrangement did not give entire satisfaction, and lasted only one year. In the spring of 1827, Mr. Henry Fellowes, then presiding over the establishment at Hurstbourne Park, was induced to undertake the management, and the pack, under the title of '*The Vine Hounds*,'* emerging from the difficulties which such a continual change of masters could not but cause, began a long career of success. Mr. Fellowes retained the management, with a brief interval, for some time after I had ceased to hunt, in 1834. I do not remember precisely in what year he made it over finally to a Committee. Subsequently Captain Mainwaring was the master for several seasons. For a few seasons they were kept by the present Earl of Portsmouth, and once they unhappily fell into the hands of a low person, who brought discredit upon the hunt. I rejoice to know that the country is now again hunted by a gentleman and a sportsman; and though I am

* When the gentlemen of the country received the pack from Mr. Abraham Pole, they gave it this title; for the purpose of perpetuating the memory of the old friend who had founded it. The Vine leaf on the button had been worn in Mr. Chute's days, but the hounds had been called simply 'Mr. Chute's.'

never likely to see his hounds, I always hear with satisfaction of the sport which he has shown, and the popularity which he enjoys.

I knew pretty well all that the Vine hounds did during the first six or seven years of Mr. Fellowes's administration, for I hunted with him during some part of all those seasons, and corresponded with him when absent. I will try to record some particulars of that period.

Mr. Apperly, writing for the 'Sporting Magazine' in Nov. 1827, nearly three years after Mr. Chute's death, observes the great improvement in size and power which had taken place in the pack during that interval, and seems to attribute the change to the huntsman Adamson. The improvement is true, but it was a mistake to suppose that it was due to Adamson. As the opinion which Mr. Apperly there expresses about the appearance of Mr. Chute's hounds, as he had known them in 1822-23, is far less favourable than that which I have given of them a few years earlier, I must offer some explanation of the difference. In that interval the pack had deteriorated. A terrible malady had broken out in the kennel, which, though pronounced on medical authority *not* to be hydrophobia, yet bore a fearful resemblance to that disease. A great many hounds died of it; and much anxiety was felt for the huntsman, who was supposed to have been bitten by one of them. It became necessary for Mr. Chute to recruit his numbers, which he did, partly by drafts from Mr. Lumley Saville, of which, however, only two hounds proved to be of much value; and partly by retaining in his own entries for two or three years hounds which, under other circumstances, would have been

rejected as being under the mark. It must also be admitted that Mr. Chute had for some years been breeding too exclusively from his own dogs, without infusing that fresh blood which is continually required; not to change the sort, but to keep it up to its proper standard, and to prevent the degeneracy which is the sure consequence of breeding '*in and in.*' Thus not only the size and beauty of the pack, but also their quality, had suffered. The faults inherent in the breed had come out more strongly. When Adamson took the pack in hand, they were inferior to what they had been five years before, and became five years later. There were three high-flying bitches, of whom he did not like to take out any two together; because, when they began to race jealously against each other, they cared little how far they left the scent behind them. But the slow process of improvement was already begun. In the last year of Mr. Chute's life I had persuaded him, chiefly through the influence of his brother, to try a cross from the celebrated John Warde, at the Craven kennel, which was certainly going at once to the fountain-head, both for power and for steadiness. Mr. T. Chute went to Mr. Warde's kennel, and selected two dogs, Voucher and Dragon, and the produce of each was a litter of excellent hounds, who were afterwards bred from.*

* One of these hounds, called Villager, became celebrated for his beauty and goodness, and was much bred from in his own and in other kennels. My old friend, William Windham of Dinton, an excellent judge, but whose prepossessions were all in favour of a larger style of hound, pronounced the Vine Villager to be the handsomest foxhound he had ever seen. This hound never would enter to a scent till late in his first season.

Mr. Pole did equal good by obtaining, I know not by what influence, a first-rate dog called Racer, from the Duke of Beaufort. He certainly could not have been drafted for any fault, for he had none: he was only a two or three years' hunter, perfect in shape and in work. This hound ran for several seasons in the pack, and helped to improve them by his stock. Mr. Fellowes continued this good beginning by sending occasionally, though sparingly, to some dog in the kennel of Mr. Assheton Smith, Mr. Villebois, or Sir John Cope. The result was that, during the six or seven years of which I am now speaking, the Vine hounds were more full of power than they had been when Mr. Apperly had first known them: not that any individual hound was larger, or of a different stamp from what Mr. Chute had originally bred, but that all were brought up to nearly the same standard, and no under-sized bitches were allowed amongst them. Certainly their old character remained unimpaired: their brilliancy in cover and their industry in hunting were generally admitted. The master of another pack of foxhounds, an excellent judge, observed to me, at that time, that the Vine hounds seemed to him to do as much work at a check, in *one* minute, as most hounds do in *two*; and if I were to be asked which I considered the best pack of foxhounds I had ever hunted with, though I might hesitate to answer the question, yet certainly there are none whom I could *set before* the Vine hounds during the first five years of Mr. Fellowes' mastership. I do not know exactly at what time, or by what degrees, their character was altered; but I know that the change was completely effected by the year 1848. I do not mean to say that

they had become a *worse* pack of hounds, for of that I had no means of judging ; but that they had become a very *different* pack. In the February of that year I hunted with them one day, for the last time, not having seen them for several years previously. Two brothers, named Cox, were then the huntsman and whipper-in. Cox told me that the pack then consisted almost entirely of drafts from Mr. Assheton Smith, and that *he did not believe there was a drop of the old Vine blood remaining in it.* The appearance and the action of the hounds quite confirmed this statement. They did their work that day well, but in a style totally different from that of the old Vine ; and I went away with rather a sad conviction, that my dear old friend's sort of hound was lost to the sporting world.

When Mr. Fellowes accepted the charge of the pack, he was very little experienced in hunting ; but he was a man of great vigour of mind and earnestness of purpose, and possessed remarkable talent for organisation and command. He was fortunate in his huntsman ; and the control which his peculiar position at Hurstbourne Park gave him over a large property was a great advantage to him. He soon learned enough of the business to be a very efficient and successful master of hounds.

Adamson was, for some years, an excellent huntsman, till he unhappily impaired his faculties by drinking. He was an admirable rider, always close to his hounds, whether in cover or out, whether on the hills or in the vale, without ever distressing his horse or overriding the hounds. This was the great secret of his success, just as the opposite fault had been the chief cause of George's comparative failure.

Adamson was always at hand to give assistance at the moment when it was wanted; and the consequence was, that the Vine hounds, during this period, were more frequently running hard, and on good terms with their fox, than any other pack that I have hunted with. Adamson's retirement very nearly coincided with the time when I left off hunting in the year 1834, beyond which date I do not carry these observations.

The country hunted at this time was nearly the same with that which Mr. Chute had occupied; including, of course, all that is now given up for a time to the South Berks; but Mr. Fellowes, by an agreement made with Mr. Assheton Smith, gave up to him that portion of Doiley Wood which the Vine had drawn, and received in return Doles' Wood, which again was afterwards given back to Mr. Smith in exchange for Wherwell Wood. Either of these great covers was very useful, not only for cubbing, but also for an occasional day to get hounds into wind after a frost, or when the better parts of the country required rest. A large wood suited the Vine; and they seldom came away from either Doles or Wherwell, at any time of the year, without blood. It is remarkable that, while parts of Doiley Wood never hold a scent, Doles, on the opposite side of the same valley, at about the same elevation, and apparently on a similar soil, is one of the best scenting covers in Hampshire. I have seen the Vine hounds in that wood run into a healthy dog fox, after thirty-five minutes' racing, without ever leaving the cover.

The pack consisted of about forty couples of hounds, and they hunted three times a week: on

Monday, Wednesday, and Friday; and on Monday, Thursday, and Saturday in the alternate weeks. Each day had its own country appropriated to it. Monday was always on the south side of the Great Western Road; Thursday in the Dean's Wood country, between that road and the Vale; Wednesday, in the Pole's Wood and Hurstbourne Park country; the last day in the week, whether Friday or Saturday, somewhere in the Vale. The Monday country could hardly stand the weekly demands made upon it; and would have been altogether insufficient had it not been for the aid of many a good day's sport with foxes driven away by the H.H., and going back into that country.

For the first two seasons after the loss of Mr. Chute, foxes were very scarce. The interest in hunting seemed for a time to be gone; no system of preserving had been established, and many litters of foxes were stolen or destroyed; but the few that were found, being mostly old foxes, afforded capital sport. In Adamson's first season, under Mr. Pole, he drew fourteen blanks and killed fourteen brace of foxes, with many excellent runs. The result of his second season, with Mr. Beaver, was nearly the same; but when Mr. Fellowes assumed the command, things rapidly mended. There was generally a fair supply of foxes; and he often killed about twenty-four brace, and sometimes more, in a season. The pack was seldom out of blood, though Mr. Fellowes very rarely dug a fox after regular hunting had commenced. He considered that a fox was generally of more use to him *alive* than *dead*. I have only to add that the riding in the Vine Hunt was greatly improved at

this time. Adamson set an excellent example; Mr. Fellowes himself was no mean performer across a country, being very quick and decided, with only, perhaps, too great an anxiety to be first. I need not mention names, but you must well remember that, at this period, there were generally some ten or a dozen men out, who rode in a good style, and from whom it was very difficult for hounds to get away.





LETTER VIII.

MR. WARDE'S HOUNDS IN THE CRAVEN COUNTRY.

WHEN I began to reside near Newbury, in November 1820, the celebrated John Warde occupied the Craven country. Mr. Warde irresistibly reminded one of Sir John Falstaff, for not only might he have represented the genial knight without stuffing, but he could almost have rivalled him in wit, and in some other qualities in his conversation, which savoured more of the taste of the Elizabethan age than of that of the nineteenth century. He was a gentleman of old family and good connections, and possessed a considerable estate and place in Kent. He had much of the finished manner belonging to a former period, with more of what may be termed outside varnish, more of studied courtesy, and especially of compliment towards ladies, than would now be thought to be in the best taste. His manners and temper in the field were excellent; and if ever he had occasion to check an unruly sportsman, it was done by wit and ridicule, and not by abuse or oaths. Mr. Warde had kept hounds so long, in so many countries, and with so high a reputation, that he

was sometimes called 'The father of foxhunting.' The Craven was the last country that he held. It would scarcely have satisfied him in his hard-riding days; but, with the age and weight to which he had then attained, he did not object to its large woods, uncertain scent, and short-running foxes, while it had certainly much to recommend it. It was, in every sense, a friendly country. A blank was unknown; if a second or a third fox was required, it could generally be found; while the sociability of its excellent neighbourhood exactly suited Mr. Warde's tastes, and afforded ample scope for his remarkable powers of amusing conversation, whether by the cover's side or at the dining table.

Mr. Warde's kennels and stables were at Hungerford; and though rather rough and unsightly to the eye, yet contained every provision necessary for the well-being of the animals which inhabited them. His stable arrangements were peculiar. His horses, to the number, I think, of about a dozen, stood all together in one undivided building, which seemed to have been once a barn, and to have been adapted by him to his present purpose. I believe that their allowance of hay was limited; but the more a horse would consume of old oats and beans, the better did Mr. Warde like him; for it was a favourite maxim of his, that 'the goodness of a hunter goes in at his mouth.' The horses wore *no clothing of any kind*; but the temperature of the stable, from so many animals standing together, was high. The result, so far as I was able to observe, was that they were bright in their coats and in good health. Clipping was only just beginning to be known, and was not practised in

this stable. For keeping up the circulation and brightening the coats of his horses, Mr. Warde trusted to hard manual labour; for he was fond of another old maxim,—‘It is elbow-grease that makes the horse shine.’ I have heard him say, ‘I like to sit on the corn-bin, when the helpers are strapping their horses, and see that they put out their whole strength, and that they *sweat well themselves*; and then I like to *wind* them as they pass by me: a fellow who does not *stink* after rubbing down a hunter will never do for me.’

Mr. Warde hunted four times a week, with an occasional fifth day, which his large and well-stocked country could well stand, and for which he kept a very sufficient number of hounds and horses. If I remember right, the pack consisted of rather more than fifty couples. These hounds were in many respects remarkable. First, for their great size. They seemed to have been bred for the purpose of *carrying weight*, rather than for only *carrying a scent*. There was one huge animal, called Maniac, upwards of twenty-seven inches high, who could carry the huntsman’s son, a boy about eleven or twelve years old, round the kennel on his back. Of course it was scarcely possible to breed dogs of such a size without some degree of heaviness and coarseness; but it must be allowed that many of the dogs, and nearly all the bitches, were beautifully formed, and were really magnificent animals.

They were also remarkable for the closeness and accuracy with which they would hunt a bad scent, and for the impossibility of driving them beyond it, or of lifting them to a halloo. When Mr. Warde was

taking possession of the Craven country, he was warned by an old sportsman in that hunt, that at certain times of the year, when the fields were full of labourers, he would be more troubled with halloos than he had been accustomed to in grass countries. He replied, 'They may halloo their hearts out, without doing any harm: my hounds do not know what a halloo means; they take no notice of any sound except the voice or horn of their huntsman.' This was no exaggeration, but the exact truth; and both the excellencies and deficiencies of the pack were connected with this peculiarity. I have heard Mr. Warde laughingly justify his preference for a large heavy hound by saying, 'Those big heads and throaty necks of theirs are such a weight, that when they have got their noses well down to the ground, it is not very easy for them to lift them up again.' Mr. Warde had a strong opinion, that while hounds continued on the line of their fox, with their noses *full of scent*, as he termed it, they would hunt through ground on which they would be quite unable to pick up the scent again, if they were lifted; and he would tell the following instance, which I give on his authority. Once when hunting a fox with a failing scent, they came to a long check in the open. The huntsman made three circular casts, each wider than the preceding one, in vain. The hounds were then brought back to the spot where they had first checked; where, after a little while, they again took up the scent, and hunted it slowly through every one of the three rings which had been made in the casts.

But perhaps their most eminent and useful quality was their *entire steadiness from riot of every kind*, to

a degree which I never saw equalled, or approached by any other pack. Probably this arose partly from the nature of the animal (large foxhounds being, I think, generally less inclined to riot than small ones); partly by the fact, that the country which they hunted was very full both of hare and deer, so that the hounds were accustomed to them; partly by the abundance of foxes, and the great number that they killed in cub-hunting. Certainly, by the time that regular hunting began, there was scarcely a puppy who could not be trusted when he spoke; and a rate was very seldom heard. Consequently, the confidence which the huntsman placed in his hounds was implicit, and was of great service on critical occasions. If, when they were picking out a cold scent in Savernake Forest, some well-meaning man took upon himself to warn the huntsman that he had seen a hare or a deer go along that way, the answer would be, 'Well, sir, I cannot help that; my hounds must hunt their fox, whatever else may have gone along the same way.' I once received a lesson on that point. We were drawing Bedwin Brail, when I saw a hare come into a ride, and observed a hound, called Dowager, rushing through the bushes after her, but without giving tongue. I thoughtlessly cried out, 'Ware hare!' a sound of which the huntsman did not approve: so he immediately corrected me, saying, 'Don't rate her, sir; she is doing no harm, poor thing; she only wants to get a look at it to see what it is.' And, sure enough, as soon as Dowager got into the ride, and saw the hare scudding away, she turned quietly back to draw for a fox. I should observe, however, that in drawing preserves these hounds contrived to chop and eat a considerable

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number of hares or rabbits, though they said nothing about it, and never pursued them.

There were always two whippers-in in the field ; but, when Mr. Warde was out, one of them was a good deal occupied in attending on him with his second horse ; for though he no longer rode hard, yet his weight was such as to render this relief very acceptable to his horses. The men wore green coats, with black velvet caps, and were hardly so smart in their appointments as would be expected in these days. The huntsman was generally well mounted, but the whips badly. Their horses, like everything else in the establishment, were of a large size ; but generally under-bred, and sometimes nearly worn out. Will Hidden, the first whip, rode a huge creature above seventeen hands high, called by the appropriate name of 'Hill-top.' I remember that one of his horses fell down dead in Chadleworth Wood one day, before the hounds had found ; and when Will appeared, wading through the underwood, with the saddle and bridle on his arm, and announced the event, Mr. Warde coolly observed, 'Well, I have no right to be surprised ; to my knowledge, he was twenty-three years old.' Will Hidden was an uncouth-looking fellow, with an ugly face, an awkward figure, and a cracked voice. He could *halloo* so as to be heard all over the Welford Woods, but could scarcely *speak* so as to be understood. He was a very good whipper-in, but was the only good kennel servant I ever knew who did not like his business. He said that, as it was the only work that he had learned to do, he must stick to it for a livelihood ; but that, for his part, he would rather, any day, go to plough.

The huntsman was about fifty years old : his name

was Neverd, a name which became a prolific source of jest: he was called 'Never-right,' and 'Never-ride; but whatever wit there might have been in these appellations, there certainly was very little truth in them. He was right quite as often as could be expected of any man in so difficult a country; and those who taunted him with being too fond of trying back seemed to be incapable of observing the fact that, three times out of four, especially in the forest, the fox actually was behind him.* Nor was he a bad rider: he had not the quickness of a young man, but he was always going steadily somewhere among the first flight of horsemen, and was generally with his hounds as soon as he was wanted. Mr. Warde's system of hunting did not admit of taking hounds in hand very quickly, while the close hunting nature of the hounds ensured to huntsmen the advantage of knowing exactly how far they had made it good; so that, on the whole, I do not think the sport ever suffered from the huntsman not being forward enough; while, whenever the pace became serious, and the fences were severe, Neverd was sure to be much closer to the hounds than most of those who laughed at him.

* Few men knew more about foxhunting in general, or the Craven country in particular, than my uncle, Fulwar Fowle of Kintbury, from whom, more than from any other person, I learned what little I ever knew on the subject. If he had heard any one speak a word in disparagement of that country, he would probably have turned on him with a flat contradiction; but I once heard him say bitterly, when put out of temper by some short running foxes: 'There are only two things that a true-bred Berkshire fox thinks of, from the moment he is found to the moment he is killed, and those are, *how he can get behind you, and, where he can go to ground.*'

As I hunted for several seasons, both with Mr. Warde and Mr. Chute, whose respective packs may be considered as representing the largest and the smallest kinds of foxhounds, I had ample opportunities of comparing the work of the two sorts, and of forming some opinion as to which was preferable. Now, supposing each to be equally well handled, I feel no doubt that the smaller sort, with its quicker style of work, though not without its peculiar faults, is yet the best adapted for such countries as the Craven or the Vine, consisting, as they chiefly do, of large woods, flinty hills, and arable fields with small fences. I admit that, on the rare occasions when Warde's hounds were close to their fox, they could go rather faster than the smaller sort, either amongst fences, or over an open down, especially in the afternoon, for they were usually brought out too full to go their fastest in the morning; but those are just the times when all foxhounds can go *fast enough*; and Warde's hounds were less frequently near their fox than Mr. Chute's were. Their slowness in cover, and their reluctance to play forward with a catching scent in the open, frequently threw them behind their game. They afforded admirable specimens of cold hunting; not a fault was committed; not a hound out of place: you had the satisfaction of knowing exactly where they had lost the fox: but he was too often lost, or, if killed, too frequently slowly and scientifically walked to death. Mr. Warde's hounds would, undoubtedly, work through difficulties, especially amongst riot, in which Mr. Chute's hounds would have been foiled; but they more often *got into* difficulties, whereas the smaller hounds usually kept much nearer to their fox,

and would be running hard on days when the larger pack would be hunting slowly far behind him. Mr. Warde's field, however, was the place in which a young sportsman could best learn the rules and principles of hunting. I acquired more knowledge of the science in two or three seasons with him, than I should have gained by hunting all my life with Mr. Chute.

I have observed that foxes in the Craven country were apt to be short runners. This is to be accounted for, partly by the number and size of the woods, partly by the favourable circumstance that many proprietors, who were great game preservers, were also preservers of foxes, and suffered many litters to be bred in places where they could find plenty of food close at hand; but, perhaps, the chief cause of the evil was the abundance of earths. I am writing of forty years ago, and things may be different now. Indeed, I know that when Mr. Thomas Smith had the country, he dug out and destroyed as many earths as he could on purpose to correct this evil. But even in my days, some of the longest and straightest runs that I ever saw were in the Craven country. I am tempted to give an account of one which, for variety of country and abundance of incident, was the most remarkable that I was ever in.

The fox was found at a small cover called Waterman's, between Hampstead Park and Woodhay. Soon after he had been found, he was viewed by several persons, and was observed to have only half a brush. As it was the first hunting day after a fall of snow, the vale was particularly wet and deep; and we had about forty minutes of it, at a good pace, before we reached the bottom of the Coombe Hills. These

hills were covered with snow, which had drifted into the hollow road, which goes slanting up them, so as to render it scarcely passable. The scent, however, seemed to become better than ever; and, of course, the hounds were far ahead before the first few horsemen had struggled up to the summit. To add to the difficulty, a thick fog covered the tops of the hills, though it was quite clear on the lower grounds. For some time, we had nothing to guide us but the tracks of the pack in the sloppy snow; and when, presently, we heard the cry seemingly close to us, we had the disappointment of discovering that the hounds were on another hill, from which we were still separated by a valley. Thus we struggled on through the fog, leaving Coombe Wood and village to the right, and over the open country towards Faccombe, which lay on our left, when suddenly we emerged from the fog, and found ourselves with the hounds, who had never checked, and were still running hard, within a mile of the great Faccombe Woods. I think there were only four of us, of whom the huntsman was one, who formed this advanced squadron, and that about a dozen more came up to us in the wood. The fox went straight through the Faccombe Woods, running from north to south, across the western end of them, which lies nearest to Netherton, over the deep hollow called Netherton Bottom, and up the opposite steep hill, still pointing southward. On the top of this hill, hounds, after a check, turned and hunted a very cold scent back down the hill again, into Netherton Bottom, to the very edge of the great body of woods that we had come through. Here Neverd showed great decision: he said, 'I know how it is; the hounds

have come back with some old disturbed scent down this hill. Our fox is certainly gone forward; and I have no doubt I could get on him again. Is it worth while? What shall I do?' Mr. Wroughton, of Wolley Park, who, in Mr. Warde's absence, took the lead, looked at his watch, and said, 'Well, if you think you can recover him, do so.' The huntsman then again ascended the hill, and within a field of the spot where he supposed the hounds to have changed, got upon the line of his hunted fox, with a fair scent, which kept continually improving. He still went on southwards, over the Ibthorp water meadows, never afterwards touching a cover, or seeming to know where he was. He bore a little to the left, till he got close under Pill Heath, but declined that, and all the great Doles Woods, and bearing more round to the right, was run from scent to view, and pulled down in the open near Tangley Clumps; and lo! when he was taken in hand, he had the same half brush which had been observed at Waterman's two hours and a half before, proving that he was the same fox, fairly recovered by science and perseverance, and not, as might otherwise have been suspected, a fresh fox, which had got up somewhere in the long line of country which we had gone through.





LETTER IX.

TRUMAN VILLEBOIS, ESQ., AND THE H. H.

I DOUBT whether four better men in their several capacities were ever engaged together in the management of a pack of foxhounds than were to be seen with the H. H. when Mr. Villebois was master, Forster, huntsman, and Sawyer and John Jennings,* the two whippers-in. The three first-mentioned were of rare excellence in their several departments; and Jennings, who afterwards hunted the Old Berkeley under Mr. Harvey Combe, was very good in the field; and moreover rode with so fine a hand and such good judgment, that

* Nimrod, in one of his letters, quotes Forster saying of Jennings, 'He is the first of the family that was ever in our line.' This is true. I was well acquainted with the family. His sister was my nurse: his first situation was that of servant of all work at Steventon Manor Farm, and his first office as a sportsman was shooting partridges, with a gamekeeper's certificate, for his own master and for my father. He considered it a rise in life when he became groom in Mr. Villebois' stables; but he was a good-looking, intelligent, well-mannered, as well as steady youth; and these qualifications, together with his very good horsemanship, gradually raised him, till he married Forster's daughter, and at last attained to a rank similar to that of his father-in-law, as huntsman to a pack of foxhounds.

he was frequently put on some young horse intended for Mr. Villebois' use the following season.

Mr. Villebois had this valuable qualification for a master of hounds, that his character and manners were such as to secure prompt obedience from his servants, and respect and deference from all who hunted with his hounds. He was always calm and courteous, but firm and decided; claiming for himself, and yielding to others, what was due to each. Old Will Biggs, whom I mentioned in a former letter as living on a pension from him, spoke of him to me with respect, as well as with gratitude. 'Ah!' said he, 'Mr. Villebois was a right good master: when he said a thing was to be done, we knew that it must be done, and no mistake: and *it is a very good thing for a servant to know that of his master.*' A little while before Forster came, Mr. Villebois had turned off a very clever huntsman, because his character was not such as he chose to retain amongst his servants. Every thing in his establishment was conducted with the most systematic propriety; no oath, or voice of anger or of altercation was to be heard from the men.* The whipper-in accosted Forster as 'Sir;' while Forster was obedient to the least signal from his master, though it was by no means Mr. Villebois' habit to interfere with his huntsman ostensibly in the field. A sense of right and duty

* I once went with a friend to the meet of a neighbouring pack, then managed by a gentleman from a distant country. On my return from seeing them find, I observed to my friend, an H.H. man, that I had heard more swearing and altercation in that one hour, than I had ever heard in all the years that I had hunted with Chute or Villebois. My friend smiled, and observed he supposed 'it must be *the ——shire dialect which we were not used to.*'

seemed to be the leading principle in Mr. Villebois' mind. I believe that he carried out this principle in graver matters : I have only to note how it came out in the management of his sports. For instance, though he would not willingly engage himself to dine out on a hunting day, yet if he had made such an engagement, he would leave the hounds running rather than fail to keep it. Again, it once happened, when I was out with him on a by-day, and we were pressing our fox well over the open, with a fair prospect of killing him, that we drew near to Chilton Wood, which was advertised as one of the meets of that week. Immediately Villebois' horn was heard a little wide of us, and the hounds were stopped : he would rather curtail his own day's sport than run the risk of breaking faith with the public by disturbing a cover appropriated to another day. I remember that Sir Henry Warde was riding close to me : he was a younger brother of John Warde, though not by any means a young man, and was full of the family enthusiasm for hunting. When he heard the inevitable horn, he turned to me with a look of vexation, exclaiming, ' Well, I dare say this is all very right ; but *I* could not have given that order to save my life.' Again, it chanced that I was one of a small party who had gone to a meet, not far from the kennel, on a day so wet that the hounds did not come. At the instigation of some of the party, we rode on to Harmsworth to complain of their not keeping their appointment. Villebois had considered the day too bad for hunting, and, I think, was not particularly well pleased with the application ; but he said at once, ' Certainly, gentlemen, if you have chosen to come to the place of meeting in such weather, you have a right to the hounds : only

you must excuse my going out with you.' Accordingly the men and hounds were sent out, and we had a long bad day in drenching rain. Such a man could not fail to have complete control over his field : a quiet word of admonition from him had more effect than violent language from some other men. If the horsemen were pressing too close upon Forster, when he was casting his hounds in the open (a frequent cause of mischief in Hampshire), it was sufficient for Villebois to rein in his horse, and exclaim with his sonorous and somewhat stern voice, ' Gentlemen, I fancy the hounds are checked ! ' in order to make every man remember that he was wrong. I once witnessed a very remarkable instance of this calm assertion of authority. We had found in Preston Oakhills, and the fox had gone away at the upper end, along the broad green lanes leading to where Barkham House then stood. A white frost was going off, and the scent was weak. The fox threaded the right hand hedgerow, running a little way on the field side, and a little way on the lane side of the fence alternately, in a manner which must have made it difficult for the best sportsmen to avoid getting before hounds. Villebois saw the danger, and turning to the mass of horsemen, not yet dispersed, but crowded together in the broad lane, he put Forster and Sawyer forward, saying, ' Now, gentlemen, if you please, let no one else go before me while we are in this lane.' He was implicitly obeyed. After the fox had threaded the hedgerow in this manner for some time, carefully hunted by the hounds, he turned to the right across a field, pointing towards Bradley Wood, when hounds laid down their sterns and began to run, and Villebois, turning round, took off his hat, and said,

‘Thank you, gentlemen; now pray ride just as you please.’

Mr. Villebois was an excellent judge of everything connected with hunting. It happened, more than once, that Sawyer hunted the hounds for some weeks, when Forster had been disabled by an accident.* On these occasions the average of sport and of blood was quite as good as usual; so that many began to think that Sawyer was just as clever a huntsman as Forster, and that the office of whipper-in was below his deserts. But his good master shook his head, and said, ‘No; he has been in luck, and has had better scenting weather than usual; but he is no huntsman: and if ever he should be put into that situation, it will be found so: his chief merit is that his success has not made him conceited; and that he has the good sense to remain satisfied with the work which he can really do well. After Mr. Villebois’ death, Sawyer became huntsman to another pack of foxhounds in Hampshire, and I believe it was generally thought that his old master’s prophecy was fulfilled.

Mr. Villebois’ kennel and residence were at Harmsworth, about three miles from Alresford, so centrally placed that most of his meets were within eight miles of him. He hunted four times a week: on Mondays, in the northern part of his country, which had formerly been hunted by Lord Stawell and by Mr. Russell;

* One of these accidents was a bad fall into a deep stony lane, near Theddon Grange, then called Phoenix Lodge. The hounds were checked at the time, and I was informed that as Forster lay for a short time stunned, they stood in a circle round him whining, and showing great distress, as if supposing him to be dead.

on Tuesdays, beyond the Alresford road, towards the borders of the Hambledon; on Thursdays and Saturdays, in any other parts that might be convenient. He held also the Hursley country, and went to it, I think, three times in each season; at the beginning of cub-hunting, about Christmas, and in April, when the H. H. country was too dry. The hounds were always advertised as the H. H., but they were Mr. Villebois' property, and maintained at his expense. The dogs went out on Mondays and Thursdays; the bitches on Tuesdays and Saturdays. They were a size larger than Mr. Chute's, and, owing to the division of the sexes, were more sizeable. In their style of work they had perhaps rather less of dash and liveliness, and rather more of steadiness and patience; but the difference between these two packs was only one of degree, and nothing like the wide difference of style which distinguished them both from Mr. Warde's: they were both well adapted for Hampshire; and Warde would have considered both equally below the proper standard of the foxhound in size. Once, indeed, he expressed as much when he visited at Harmsworth, and looked through the kennel. There was there at that time a hound called Telamon, much larger and heavier than any of the rest. I do not know how he ever came to be entered in a pack otherwise so even; but being once entered, he proved far too good to be parted with. Warde singled him out, and with a kind of courteous sarcasm said, 'Now you have certainly shown me a pack which any man might be proud of having bred; for they are very neat, and as like to one another as if they were all from the same

father and mother ; all, except one hound ; and let me tell you that *I would rather have that one hound than all the other fifty couple put together.*

It so happened that at about this time Mr. Villebois actually did possess an unusual number of hounds bred from the same father and mother, for in the hunting pack of the season 1822-3 there were thirty-one hounds bred from his favourite dog, 'Pontiff,' of which seventeen had the same dam, 'Vengeance;' and once, when he made a by-day for some masters of hounds and amateurs of the sport, he took out a family party, consisting of the sire, the dams, and their produce ; and mustered, I think, the very sufficient number of about seventeen couples.

At Mr. Villebois' death, in 1837, these hounds became the property of his brother Frederick. Mr. F. Villebois had been for three or four years the master of the Craven hounds, and had, in that short time, got together a very clever and powerful pack, from some of the best blood in England. The gentlemen of the H.H. being left without hounds, procured these, so that the two packs were transferred each into the other's country. There was, however, a remarkable difference in their immediate success. The younger pack had extraordinary sport in Hampshire throughout their first season, under Forster, who, though about to retire on a pension from his former master, hunted them through that season. I chanced to be hunting with them one day, and heard this question put to two farmers of different ages, 'How do you like the new pack?' 'Well,' replied the older and heavier man, 'we rather wish we had the old ones back again.' 'Aye,' rejoined the lighter

weight, 'I believe you; and *so do the foxes.*' But the old H.H. hounds, though going into very good hands, were not equally successful in the Craven country. It can hardly be supposed that this arose from any inferiority in the quality of hounds which had so long maintained a high character. I believe the reason to be, that the Craven changed to a more favourable, and the H.H. to a more difficult country; and if ever two packs should again exchange places between Hampshire and that part of Berkshire, I should expect similar results. I am not going to call Hampshire a good scenting country: it is inferior to Sussex on one side, and to Dorsetshire on the other; but my experience would certainly lead me to rank it higher than the southern parts of Berkshire, Oxfordshire, and Buckinghamshire. It is true that the scent dies away soon, so that it is exceedingly difficult to recover a fox who has got far ahead on the Hampshire hills: it is true also that it is a country which dries very quickly, so that little can be done in it after the March winds have set in; but so long as the ground is sufficiently wet, the scent is often very good while it lasts, and enables hounds, if they have got a good start, to push their fox along at a very distressing pace. In my time, hounds certainly ran hard for an hour together without a serious check, more frequently in the Vine or H.H. than in the Craven country. Another disadvantage of the latter country is, that the scent varies more. The H.H. is almost entirely a hill country; and though in so large an extent there must be some variations of soil and cultivation affecting the scent, yet this is far more the case in the Craven, where their vale, hill, down, and forest present a

continual change, which is very puzzling to hounds. Moreover, the Craven was, in those days, much more full of riot, especially of deer, in Savernake Forest,—not herded together, as in a park, but getting up singly, like wild animals, which would be sure to bring into trouble any pack that was unaccustomed to them. Nimrod speaks quite as strongly as I am doing of the difficulties which hounds encounter in this country: he terms it ‘cheerless for hounds, and distressing for horses.’ Mr. Warde’s huntsman Neverd maintained that even the cold flinty hills about Coombe and Netherton held a better scent than most of his country north of the Kennet, and declared that he could generally kill his fox if he could get on good terms with him to the top of those hills. An old member of the H.H., who was well qualified to form an opinion, once told me that he should class the four contiguous countries as more or less favourable to hounds in the following order: 1st, the Hambledon; 2nd, the Vine; 3rd, the H.H.; 4th, the Craven. The Craven, however, has many redeeming advantages, especially social ones; and as I myself have an old affection for it, and for many with whom I hunted in it, I must observe that, the less easy for hounds a country may be, the greater is the praise due to those who have contrived, after all, to show a great deal of sport in it. As it can very seldom happen that two countries are thus tested by an interchange of their respective packs, I thought it might be interesting to sportsmen that I should record the result of this experiment in 1837. Of my facts I am certain, however I may be thought mistaken in the causes which I assign for them. After one season,

however, when Mr. Villebois' old pack had become accustomed to the peculiarities of their new country, the excellent quality of the hounds came out, as might be expected, and they became as good in Berkshire as they had long been in Hampshire.





LETTER X.

*SIR JOHN COPE'S HOUNDS.—MR. ASSHETON
SMITH.—MR. THOMAS SMITH.*

THE little that I have to say of Sir John Cope's hounds would furnish materials for only a short letter. I never hunted with them regularly, though I saw something of them almost every season from 1821 to 1832. I was very slightly acquainted with Sir John himself, and have no personal recollections of him to record. He took to Mr. St. John's hounds and country in 1817, and retained them, I think, till 1850. The hounds were kept all this time at his own place, Bramshill, but they had a kennel at the World's End, near Reading, for the convenience of hunting that part of their country. They hunted over a great extent of country in Berks, Hants, and Oxfordshire, with a little of Surrey, comprehending nearly all that Mr. Garth and the South Berks now occupy between them. Sir John was, I believe, deservedly popular with the members of his hunt. It used to strike me that his men rode higher bred horses than those of the neighbouring hunts. I have only two objects in my observations on this pack. First, to describe the very

peculiar kind of hound with which Sir John began to hunt, which few sportsmen now living can remember; and next, to relate the extraordinary performance of his dog Sampson, which deserves to be recorded.

Those who knew Sir John Cope's hounds only since the year 1830, can have little idea how very different they had been in character some ten years before that period. They were a light, airy-looking animal, higher on the legs and longer in the neck, but scarcely of more substance than the H. H., or than the largest of Mr. Chute's. They were, however, a remarkably wiry, muscular race, and I am inclined to think that, either from natural constitution, or from being accustomed to harder work, they were the most difficult to tire of all the three packs. It is certain that they actually did more work; for they travelled longer distances, and drew later in the day. They were very clever and effective in their way; but it was a way peculiar to themselves; for they were so fond of independent action that many people did not scruple to call them a pack of skirthers; and it is certain that if any neighbouring master of hounds bred from them, he found in the produce a tendency to get wide. This peculiarity, however, gave them an advantage in cover; it was difficult for a fox to live long before them in a wood; for while a certain number were working on his scent, the others, instead of going direct to the cry, would be scoring away on either side, hoping for a turn in their own favour; so that, whichever way the fox might turn, he was sure to be crossed by some of these outsiders, who would thus become the leading hounds. Once, when Mr. Warde had given these hounds a draw in the Craven

country, they killed in this manner, in one day, three of his foxes, who had not been accustomed to this guerilla kind of warfare. Indeed, if the only object were to make the fox break or die, this mode of proceeding would be perfect ; but, unfortunately, the same system was apt to make the run across a country too much of a scramble: the hounds seldom came away together from a large wood. Tocock, the huntsman, was quite satisfied if he could get off with five or six couples of hounds racing pretty close to their fox ; he would gallop along, horn in hand, blowing it whenever he could, as a rallying point to the rest of the pack, who would come streaming in from right and left ; some before, some behind, and some in the midst of the horsemen ; so that it became a common observation amongst sportsmen, that Cope's hounds in a run were all over the country. I suspect, however, that these hounds, with all their irregularities, kept closer to their fox, and more frequently gave a good account of him at the end, than has since been done under a more regular system. I desire to say distinctly that this description has no reference to any period later than 1828, and that the character of the pack had begun to change for some years earlier. It was probably a dissatisfaction with the state of things which I have described that led Sir John Cope, about the year 1822, to begin breeding largely from Mr. Warde's kennel, and thus to lay the foundation of the powerful kind of hound now so well maintained by Mr. Garth. There is no painter whose earlier style is more distinguishable from his later, than were the appearance and the work of Sir John's earlier and later packs ; but it may, perhaps, be doubted whether, in

getting rid of the faults, he did not also lose some of the peculiar merits of the original breed, which had been bequeathed to the country from Mr. St. John, the original founder of the pack.

And now I must give an account of Sampson's performance, which might be suspected of exaggeration if it did not come from a disinterested, or, I might almost say, a reluctant witness.

The H.H. and Sir John Cope had met one day at the extremities of their respective countries, and each chanced to run, at the same time, into the opposite end of a large cover near Sutton Common, called Sheephouse; but they did not join. Probably each fox was headed by the cry of the other pack: at any rate, each party went back to their own country. The H.H. chanced to have a very long and hard day. Soon after leaving Sheephouse, a strange hound was observed with them. This hound did a great deal of work, and showed remarkable powers of speed and nose; and, as he was wider in his work than the pack, and frequently hit off the scent, he was continually getting ahead of them, till at last he ran completely away from them, and both the fox and the mysterious stranger were lost, near Bentworth, many miles distant from Sheephouse. As Forster was making a last despairing cast, a labourer told him that he had just seen the fox, followed by a single hound; and, by following the man's directions, the fox was found lying dead in a lane, and the hound, very much bitten about the head, standing over him. After being hospitably received, and his wounds dressed at Harmsworth, he was sent to Bramshill, and there owned as their dog Sampson. I was told this, very

soon after it occurred, by Mr. Fred. Villebois, who was that day out with his brother's hounds. He said, 'Of course, we were not best pleased at being so beaten, and could only account for it by supposing that this hound had been skirting about (as the fact of his joining us rather implies), and so had taken less out of himself early in the day than our hounds had done. However,' he candidly added, 'that might or might not have been the case; the fact is, that he fairly ran away from us, and killed the fox by himself.'

I have seen Sampson: he was a yellow pied hound, compact, strong, and handsome, but not large. I do not recollect the year in which this occurred, but it was some time previous to 1828.

I have now noticed all the packs of foxhounds, bordering on the Vine country, with which I hunted in my youth; but there were two masters of hounds soon afterwards connected with those countries of such eminence, that I cannot omit some mention of them:—Mr. Thomas Assheton Smith, of Tedworth; and Mr. Thomas Smith, of Hambledon.

With the former I was scarcely acquainted, nor did I see enough of him with his hounds to enable me to express any opinion of his mode of hunting them; while his fame, both as a rider and a sportsman, stands on too high a pedestal to be either raised or lowered by any observations of mine; but I can add my humble testimony to his wonderful quickness in riding to hounds, even at an advanced age. Almost the only time I ever hunted with him, we had a very fine ring of about twelve miles from Southgrove, over the Downs, into the Pewsey Vale and back, so fast throughout that I heard Mr. Smith observe, towards

the end of it, that if the fox had been like those he had been used to hunt in other countries, he ought to have been killed twice over by that time. I chanced that day to be exceedingly well mounted by a friend; and, as I could then ride a little, I was close to hounds through the whole run. Amongst the fences in the Pewsey Vale, I could keep alongside of Mr. Smith well enough; but I was surprised to find how he beat me in quickness over the open downs, just where my comparative youth and lightness ought to have given me an advantage; but though I was not thirty, and he upwards of sixty years old, I could not get down the steep dips, nor swing up to the top of the opposite hills so straight and quick as he could. Perhaps, however, it is fair to add, that I did not distress my horse; whereas Mr. Smith brought *two* horses to stand-still, *and one of them twice*, in the course of the day, which was a very long one, and comprised more work than the fine run with which it commenced.

The other Mr. Smith is an old friend of mine. I have recorded, in my second letter, the occasion when I first observed him with hounds; but that was not the beginning of my acquaintance with him and his family. I hunted with him occasionally while he occupied the Craven country. I have no hesitation in saying that, of all the huntsmen I ever saw, Mr. Smith had the greatest natural capacity for the work.* Nor do I think that many of those who knew him in the field

* I speak of nothing later than the year 1834; and, therefore, do not include any comparison with the successful gentlemen huntsmen who may have appeared in the field since that time, such as Mr. G. Montagu, of Caversham, or Lord Macclesfield.

would differ from me on that point, though I am aware that some would scruple to call him actually the best huntsman, from thinking him too much inclined to hunt the fox himself, instead of letting his hounds do it. I am not disposed to join in this charge. There will always be differences of opinion as to the amount of assistance which hounds require, and the exact moment when they should be interfered with ; and no doubt Mr. Smith, with his remarkable talent for hunting, the rapidity of his decision, and the kind of natural instinct by which he seemed to divine where the fox was gone, must have been sometimes tempted to take matters into his own hands earlier than others would have done ; but I must say that, so long as hounds were able to work, he would generally wait very patiently upon them. I am inclined to think that the accusation rested chiefly on the undeniable fact that Mr. Smith *could*, and often *did*, kill his fox, and show a certain kind of sport to his field on days when hounds could do nothing of themselves, and when, with any ordinary huntsman, nothing would have been done. I once saw a remarkable instance of this from Ashridge, near East Ilsley, when Mr. Smith kept on the line of his fox for ten miles, and at last killed him in the open, on a bleak windy day in March, without scent enough to carry hounds across a single field. The fox went nearly straight, through the Hampstead Norris and Bradfield country, where the enclosures were generally small, and bordered by hedgerows. Mr. Smith, seeing how matters stood, lost no time in suffering the hounds to attempt to hunt in the open, but lifted them at once across every field, marking his fox only at the fences, and hunting him through the

woods. By these means he kept so near him, that at last he was able, by help of a halloo, to get close to him in the swampy bottom behind Englefield Park, whence the hounds took the matter into their own hands, racing through the old deer park and village, and pulling down the fox under the elm trees, in the large open field (now taken into park) between Englefield House and Theale. But I well remember that Mr. Smith thought it right to apologise for the feat which he had performed, saying, 'I do not pretend, gentlemen, that this is the best style of killing a fox; I can only say that if it had not been done in this way, it could not have been done at all, on such a day as this.'

On one occasion, when Mr. Smith chanced to be out with a celebrated pack in a distant country, the hounds, when running hard with a sinking fox, suddenly threw up in the middle of a field, in a manner which, I suppose, indicated that the fox had been headed. The master, who was hunting the hounds that day, in the accidental absence of the huntsman, having made his cast in vain, applied to Mr. Smith, as a great authority, to say what should be done. Mr. Smith was at first reluctant to interfere, but on the master repeating, 'You will do me a favour if you will only say what you would do, if you were hunting the hounds at this moment,' he said, 'Well, if you really wish me to say, I should hold them along that hedge,' pointing out the place. The master did so, and recovered and killed his fox. This was told me by an eye-witness.

It always struck me that Mr. Smith's readiness to take large fences was one main cause of his success. I do not mean when hounds were running; for most

men who undertake to hunt a pack of foxhounds will ride hard then; and, good as Mr. Smith was across a country, I have seen others as good as he; but I mean when he was casting his hounds. This is a quality required only in a huntsman, but very conducive to his success. Many huntsmen, if they meet with an awkward place when hounds are checked, either change their intended line of cast, or try to coax their hounds to go over the fence without them: thus they fail to make good their point, or, at least, lose much time; though they would have ridden over the same place as a matter of course if hounds had been running hard.* Now, Mr. Smith was just as ready to take any practicable place when hounds were checked as when they were running, though he might have to come back over the same line of fence immediately afterwards: thus he always *made good his ground*, and never had to *do the same thing twice*. Of course it would often happen that the cast thus made at the expense of two or three large leaps was unsuccessful; but it was not therefore useless: every huntsman must know the importance of having ascertained, with as little delay as possible, which way the fox has *not* gone.

* I once heard of a pack of foxhounds, whose huntsman generally avoided all such difficulties by the simple expedient of making his casts along *lanes* and *roads*; where the hounds must have had all the steam and pressure of a crowd of horses to assist them. A very good plan, if it satisfied the master and the field! for the fox would be sure to approve it; and so all parties would be pleased except, perhaps, the hounds.



LETTER XI.

*MR. MULLENS AND HIS HARRIERS.
AGRICULTURAL IMPROVEMENTS.—CONCLUSION.*

I have finished all that I had to say about foxhounds; but the records of my sporting recollections would be very imperfect, if they contained no mention of my old friend, Mr. Mullens. He first entered me to hare-hunting: he showed me what *it ought to be*; and I have since had frequent opportunities of observing what *it ought not to be*. Hare-hunting is certainly less adapted for well-mounted young men who love hard riding, than it is for middle-aged gentlemen, or boys taking their first lessons in hunting on their ponies; but it is a very interesting sport if you are satisfied with its peculiar character, and do not spoil it by attempting to make it what it never can be. For though foxhunting is undoubtedly a finer thing, yet you will not improve the former by trying to assimilate it to the latter; on the contrary, you will, I think, lose the essence of both, and produce a mixture which the taste of the true sportsman rejects.

The principles on which the two pursuits should be conducted are altogether different. In foxhunting

the great objects are to keep as close to your game, and to get into as few difficulties as possible ; because, on ordinary scenting days at least, a good pack of foxhounds are not more than a match for a good fox, and also because a good fox seldom stops till he is beaten ; so that, if you once get far behind him, you have little chance of improving your position. But the harrier is generally more than a match in power for the strongest hare ; and the hare is sure to stop if she has time to do so ; and, moreover, the very charm of hare-hunting consists in working through difficulties, and enjoying an alternation of quick running and slow hunting. Therefore, it is not desirable to be always near your game. Indeed, unless she has time enough, in the course of the run, to make her doubles, and exercise her curious devices for baffling the hounds, though you may be pursuing a hare, you will see very little of hare-hunting : a pack of dwarf foxhounds racing into a hare in twenty minutes, and never three minutes behind her, is, in my opinion, no more like hare-hunting than it is like foxhunting.

And consequently the qualifications for hunting the two sorts of hounds are very different. The huntsman of harriers requires only the more ordinary qualities of judgment and patience : the huntsman of foxhounds must have, in addition to these, not only fine and bold horsemanship, but also great quickness of decision, and that rare and indescribable thing called ‘talent.’ The latter must be continually assisting his hounds, taking into consideration various contingencies and distant points ; and he has never a minute to spare in doing all this. The former has

comparatively little to do in the field, and he may do that little deliberately. If he has exercised good judgment in breeding and *drafting* his hounds, and has brought them out in good condition, handy and steady, the most difficult part of his work is done. The more he leaves them to themselves on a scent, and, perhaps, the farther he can be satisfied to keep behind them, provided he can persuade the rest of the field to do the same, the better will it be. I think that the points on which he can chiefly show superior skill are these two: knowing how to look for a hare, which is a great art; and knowing when a hare has squatted, and then patiently walking her up instead of leaving her behind him. And in both these arts Mr. Mullens was an adept. The result is, that most men of good sense, who choose to give their attention to the work, can make competent huntsmen of harriers; but a large majority of good sportsmen, who are excellent judges of fox-hunting, and know perfectly whether the thing is done well or ill, would fail miserably in doing it.

Mr. Mullens was a retired brewer, and kept his hounds at a house called Skippet's Inn, about a mile from Basingstoke, not far from the lodge into Hackwood Park. During the years that I knew him, I grew from boyhood to manhood, and he from a middle-aged to an old man. He was an excellent specimen of his class, being a shrewd, sensible, well-mannered man; and was well qualified to be a hare-hunter by temper, patience, and a thorough knowledge of the nature and habits both of the hare and the hound. When I first knew him he was always accompanied in the field by a nephew who lived with

him, and who bore the historical names of Oliver Cromwell Fleetwood, and believed himself to be descended from the family of the great Protector's son-in-law; but this representative of ancient republicanism died young; and, from that time to the end of his life, Mr. Mullens was attended by his servant Jem, who afterwards became kennel servant and whipper-in to Mr. John Portal's last pack of harriers, and who could scarcely have failed to be a good one, considering the school in which he had been brought up.

When I first knew this pack, it was in no respect remarkable. It consisted of ordinary harriers, some neat and some coarse, with three or four heavy deep-mouthed Sussex southernns, which Mr. Mullens obtained from some sporting friend near Petersfield, and one dog, named Tyrant, from Sir John Dashwood, looking like a dwarf foxhound, who could run away from the rest when the scent was good, but was of little use when it was bad; but out of these heterogeneous materials, with the help of an occasional cross from the smallest of Mr. Chute's foxhounds, Mr. Mullens, by patient and skilful breeding, was enabled to show, during the last years of his life, a pack of harriers as near perfection as can be imagined: small, but powerful, level in height, beautiful in shape, and faultless in work. Mr. Apperly, in one of his articles, selects Mr. Mullens's 'Gulliver' as a model harrier: he was so; but the same might have been said of his 'Woodlark,' and many others in the pack.

When the pack attained to this excellence, I was no longer resident in the neighbourhood; but I used to visit it for some weeks every winter, and it was a great pleasure to the old man to meet me with a pack

which he knew could so well stand criticism, and call my attention to each individual hound. Their discipline was as perfect as their energy. They would stand immovable within fifty yards of Shothanger, or Small's Coppice, or whatever wood they were going to draw, eagerly eyeing the cover, and lashing their sterns about with impatience, while their master, confident in their steadiness, would say, 'Look them well over, sir; you haven't seen them for a long while; there is no hurry; *they can wait your time*,' till, at the waving of his arm, they would rush forward, in silent excitement, and disappear in a moment, not creeping in a string through the same gap, but each taking the bank, side by side at once.

Mr. Mullens had a great respect for foxhunting, and always considered that his humble pursuit was to be kept in subjection to that nobler sport. Therefore he did not like to fix his place of meeting till he knew where Mr. Chute was going to hunt, lest he should interfere with him; and as Mr. Chute only fixed from day to day, this scruple sometimes occasioned inconvenience. He was quite free from the conceit that his hounds could go as fast, or faster, than the neighbouring foxhounds: a delusion to which I have known many masters of harriers subject, and which, if true, would be one of the worst faults that they could have. He had, however, a strong opinion, that the foxhound has by nature as tender a nose as the beagle, or the Southern hound. For some seasons, before he had brought his pack to the perfection and uniformity of which I have spoken, he kept running with them a bitch of Mr. Chute's called Haughty, who had been drafted from deficiency of speed. Mr. Mullens main-

tained that she could speak to a lower scent than any hound in his pack, and declared that he had seen frequent instances of it.

These were the only harriers I ever saw who could be entirely depended on as steady both from rabbit and from fox. Their steadiness from the latter was once put to an extreme and most unfair test. Mr. Mullens had taken out his hounds at the request of some foxhunting gentlemen, who wanted a day's sport. I know not how many were concerned in the trick which I have to relate. I believe that the ringleader was a person who was quite old enough to have known better. A bag-fox was turned down, and hallooed away as if it were a hare: the hounds were laid on the scent, but would have nothing to say to it. Mr. Mullens was for a short time puzzled, exclaiming, 'Well, this must be the worst of all the bad scenting days I ever saw: the hounds cannot even own it.' But he was much too acute a man to be long deceived; and having discovered the trick, he gave these gentlemen a rebuke at which I think their ears must have tingled. 'You have played me a very unhandsome and very silly trick. You are gentlemen who like fox-hunting. I am a humble old man, whose pleasure it is to amuse myself and my friends with hare-hunting, and I have brought out my hounds at your request. Now it has been my pride to have kept these hounds for twenty years, between two packs of foxhounds, without ever running one of their foxes a yard, or in any way injuring their sport; but if you had succeeded in making my hounds run this fox, you would not only have undone the labour of my life, but you would have had me disturbing your foxes, and interfering

with your sport, in every cover that I might run into.'

Mr. Mullens was firmly persuaded that the hares in his country had become stouter, and could stand longer before hounds, than when he had first begun to hunt. On my expressing surprise at an opinion which seemed to me so strange, and asking how he could account for such a change, he said, 'Well, sir, I think it can be sufficiently accounted for. You must remember that during those years the Swede turnip has been introduced. Now the Swede is the heartiest food that a hare can get; and moreover she is so fond of it that she will go a great distance for it. Well, there you have at once the two things which improve condition, better food and more exercise. At any rate, whether this is the reason or not, I am sure of the fact: my hounds are faster and more powerful, yet the hares stand at least as long before them as they did when I began to hunt.'

The dates of *Agricultural Improvements* are generally soon forgotten, or known only to a few scientific men. It may be well, therefore, to take this opportunity of recording what little I know on such subjects. I can say a little from my own recollections, but I have obtained my most accurate information from Mr. Terry, the same gentleman whose extraordinary run with a few harriers I mentioned in my second letter. His experience in Hampshire farming goes back to the end of the last century, when his father, though possessing property of his own in Berkshire, lived at Tunworth, and at one time farmed the whole of that parish. Being a person of more capital, as well as more intelligence, than most of his neighbours, he seems to have taken the lead in making experiments.

Mr. Terry assures me that Mr. Mullens was quite correct in saying that the Swede was scarcely known in that part of Hampshire at the beginning of this century. The first root that he ever saw bearing that name was from seed given to his father in 1802. But this was not the same with the Swede which has been since cultivated. It was a white turnip, with very strong roots, striking so deep into the earth that it was difficult to peck it up; and it was supposed on that account to exhaust the land too much. It was two or three years later that he first saw the ordinary yellow Swede which grows more on the surface of the ground. I remember that about the year 1812, an old man, who had been a farm servant from his youth, saw and tasted a Swede for the first time, and amused us by ejecting it disdainfully from his mouth with the observation, that 'it didn't seem deadly good.'

Nearly the same date must be assigned to the first appearance of the Southdown sheep in that part of Hampshire. The migration of these sheep from their native hills began less than a century ago; and it must be remembered that their native hills did not comprise the whole range of the Southdowns, but only the eastern portion of them. We know from the excellent authority of Gilbert White, that in the year 1773, these sheep were to be found only to the eastward of the river Adur, near Lancing. He says in a letter, dated December 9th, 1773, 'One thing is very remarkable as to sheep; from the westward till you get to the river Adur, all the flocks have horns, and smooth white faces, and white legs; and a hornless sheep is rarely to be seen; but as soon as you pass that river eastward, and mount Beeding Hill, all

the flocks at once become hornless, or, as they call them, poll-sheep; and have moreover black faces with a white tuft of wool on their foreheads, and speckled and spotted legs. And this diversity holds good respectively on each side, from the valley of Bramber and Beeding to the eastward and westward all the whole length of the Downs. If you talk with the shepherds on this subject, they tell you that the case has been so from time immemorial; and *smile at your simplicity* if you ask them whether the situation of these two different breeds might not be reversed. However, an intelligent friend of mine near Chichester is determined to try the experiment; and has this autumn, *at the hazard of being laughed at*, introduced a parcel of black-faced hornless rams amongst his horned western ewes. The black-faced poll-sheep have the shortest legs and the finest wool.'

This extract supplies the date of the first faint attempt that was made to bring the Southdown sheep westwards. The remaining quarter of that century probably sufficed to establish them throughout the Sussex hills; and it is reasonable to suppose that they had spread into the parts of Hampshire bordering upon Sussex, before they were known in the vicinity of Basingstoke. Their first introduction into the latter country may be fixed with tolerable certainty to the year 1801.

In that year Mr. Terry's father bought, at Lewes, 300 Southdown ewes, the finest that he could obtain; for, as he truly observed, it was not worth while to go so far to buy rubbish. He bought also more than a proportionate number of rams, because he desired to try a cross with the old Hampshire sort, as well as

to perpetuate the pure breed: but, after two years' trial, he abandoned the former, and stuck to the latter idea. That these were the first, or at least amongst the first, Southdown sheep introduced into this district seems to be proved by the fact, that an excessive prejudice was still entertained against them. Mr. Terry met with as much ridicule on the subject at Basingstoke, as Gilbert White's friend could have encountered at Chichester, twenty-eight years earlier. Amongst other absurdities he was gravely assured that *the manure of these new fangled animals would prove worthless; and that folding them over a field would do no good.* But within seven years a complete reaction had taken place in the agricultural mind, and the Southdowns became so much the fashion that even a wether of that breed would command a higher price than one equally large and fat of the old sort. It is scarcely necessary to add that the Southdowns have never ceased to occupy the countries which they so rapidly acquired; that they are now to be found in most parts of the British Islands, and that Hampshire and Wiltshire in particular have each their own sort, bred and named from them.

The entire success of the Southdowns may be contrasted with the comparative failure of a rival tribe. About the year 1810 the campaigns of Wellington in Spain brought into notice the Merino sheep. Great results were expected from them, and it was predicted that they would beat every other kind out of the field. I can remember when their merits were the common topic of conversation amongst gentlemen after dinner; and I remember also to have seen some unhappy specimens shivering in flannel jackets on

a cold winter's day. This last circumstance may sufficiently account for their failure. They were fairly tried by many who had been prepossessed in their favour; but they could not be generally established as denizens of England. As philologists tell us, that a language readily adopts certain new words which are accordant to its genius, while it rejects others which are at variance with it, so our climate sternly refused to admit a breed of sheep, which are spreading themselves widely, much to the benefit of mankind, over the plains of Australia and South America.

Sainfoin came into Hampshire about one generation earlier. My father recollected its introduction. I have been assured both by him and by others that the ground, never having before borne it, was able to maintain the plant much longer than it can now do. It was not uncommon to let a field of sainfoin remain for twenty years, and I have heard of one well authenticated instance when a very good crop was mown at the end of twenty-one years.

And now, my good friend, you have all that you asked for, and rather more. I have given you my recollections of the early days of the Vine hounds, and a great many miscellaneous recollections besides. Perhaps you will say that, when you made the request, you had no idea that I should pour forth *so much*, or that there would be *so little* in it. I am ready to plead guilty to both charges. I confess that much of what I have written is both lengthy and trivial, and better suited to form the gossip of two old friends over their wine, than to be invested with the dignity of print. But what better could you expect? When you set a stone rolling from the top of a hill, you cannot tell

where it will stop, or what amount of dust you may raise; and just so, when you set my memory trundling down into a deep vale of years; it must pursue its course, and cannot fail to stir up a great deal of rubbish which would otherwise have slept in obscurity.

And yet, perhaps, I may be allowed to plead in justification of what I have written, that time gives a certain dignity even to trifles. I remember, indeed, that Dr. Johnson somewhere speaks contemptuously of those antiquaries who collect trumpery, and set an imaginary value on things which ‘are *now rare*, only because they were *always worthless*.’ But surely our natural feelings scarcely coincide with this sarcasm. I think there is something humanising, if not elevating, in a curiosity which takes us a little out of the present, and connects us with the past, and which seeks to know what was said and done by our forefathers, even though it may be nothing better or wiser than what we are daily saying and doing ourselves. It is certain that the most ordinary articles of domestic life acquire a value if they belong to a distant age, and are dug up after having been long buried; and for some of my stories I may claim a very respectable antiquity. But after all, my best excuse must be, that I do not presume to publish this to the world, but write it only for those who, like myself, are or have been members of the Vine Hunt. It is presented to them, not without a hope that my record of the manner in which their country was acquired may be accepted as evidence, if they should ever be called on to show the title-deeds by which they hold it; and with a confidence that they will feel some interest in everything which took place in their own woods and fields. The

minstrel of an Highland chieftain was in no danger of wearying his audience by a recital of the rights or the deeds of his clan, however tedious his lay might appear to others. We too are a clan ; and I reckon largely on the indulgence of my fellow clansmen in this attempt to set forth the origin of the hunt, and to reveal the

Gentis cunabula nostræ.

If, indeed, these letters were ever to have a wider circulation, I must be content to have my trifling anecdotes of masters and servants, hounds and horses, criticised somewhat in the words of Cowper :—

Oh fond attempt, to give a deathless lot
To names ignoble, born to be forgot.

If you should ask how I could retain in my memory, for so many years, all these minute particulars about men and animals, I must reply: 1st, that during some years of my life, at the period when the memory is most tenacious, I gave a great deal of attention to such matters, and lived in very intimate intercourse with several masters of hounds, so that I drew my information from the best authorities; and 2ndly, that, about thirty years ago, I left off hunting, so that I have no later sporting experiences to disturb my earlier impressions; and this has probably enabled me to retain those impressions more distinctly, as coins which have been long hoarded would preserve the marks of the mint more sharply than if they had been kept in continual circulation. I can guarantee the truth of all that I have related from my own personal recollections; and I feel confident of the general accuracy of the facts and dates which I have

collected from the testimony of others; while I leave everyone to form his own judgment as to the soundness of the opinions which I have ventured to express on the subject of hunting generally. If they should now be considered old-fashioned, yet I think that they fairly represent the opinions held by the best sportsmen at the time when the sexagenarian was a young man.

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